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THE SHERRODS

JUSTINE SHERROD.

THE SHERRODS

By

George Barr McCutcheon

Author of "Graustark", "Castle Craneycrow", Etc.

With Illustrations by

C. D. Williams

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THE SHERRODS

CHAPTER I.

THE SOFT SUMMER NIGHT.

THROUGH the soft summer night came the sounds of the silence that is heard only when nature sleeps, imperceptible except as one feels it behind the breath he draws or perhaps realizes it in the touch of an unexpected branch or flower. The stillness of a silence that is not silent; a stillness so dead that the croaking of frogs, the chirping of crickets, the barking of dogs, the hooting of owls, the rustling of leaves are not heard, although the air is heavy with those voices of the night—the stillness of a night in the country. All human activity apparently at an end, all sign of life lost in somber shadows. The ceaseless croaking, the chirping, the hooting, the rustling themselves make up this unspeakable silence—this sweet, unconscious solitude.

A country lane, dark and gloomy, awaited the moon from the clouded east. Lighted only here

and there by the twinkling windows in roadside homes, it lay asleep in its bed of dust. Far off it straggled into a village, but out there in the country it was lost to the world with the setting of the sun.

The faint glow from the window of a cottage poured its feeble but willing self into the night as if seeking to dispel the gloom, dimly conscious that its efforts were unappreciated and undesired. Down at the rickety front gate, cloaked in blackness, stood two persons. Darkness could not hide the world from them, for the whole world dwelt within the confines of a love-lit garden gate. For them there was no sound of life except their tender voices, no evidence that a world existed beyond the posts between which they stood, his arm about her, her head upon his breast. They spoke softly in the silence about them.

"And to-morrow night at this time you will be mine—all mine," he murmured. She looked again into his face, indistinct in the night.

"To-morrow night! Oh, Jud, it does not seem possible. We are both so young and so—so—"

"So foolish!" he smiled.

"So poor," she finished plaintively.

"But, Justine, you don't feel afraid to marry me because I am poor, do you?" he asked.

"Do you think I have been poor only to be afraid

of it? We love each other, dear, and we are rich. To-morrow night I shall be the richest girl in the world," she sighed tremulously.

"To-morrow night," he whispered. His arm tightened about her, his head dropped until his lips met hers and clung to them until the world was forgotten.

Far away in the night sounded the steady beat of a galloping horse's hoofs. Louder and nearer grew the pounding on the dry roadway until at last the rollicking whistle of the rider could be heard. Standing in the gateway, the silent lovers, their happy young hearts beating as one, listened dreamily to the approach.

"He has been in the village," said she, at length breaking the silence that had followed their passionate kiss. Her slender body trembled slightly in his arms.

"And he is going home drunk, as usual," added the youth sententiously. "Has he annoyed you lately?"

"We must pay no attention to what he says or does," she answered evasively.

"Then he has said or done something?"

"He came to the schoolhouse yesterday morning, dear—just for a moment—and he was not so very rude," she pleaded hurriedly.

"What did he say to you; what did he want?" persisted her lover.

"Oh, nothing—nothing, Jud. Just the same old thing. He wanted me to give you up and—and—" She hesitated.

"And wait for him, eh? If he bothers you again I'll kill him. You're mine, and he knows it, and he's got to let you alone."

"But it will all be over to-morrow night, dear. I'll be yours, and he'll have to give up. He's crazy now, and you must not mind what he does. When I'm your wife he'll quit—maybe he'll go away. I've told him I don't love him. Don't you see, Jud, he has hope now, because I am not married. Just as soon as the wedding's over he'll see that it's no use and—and he'll let us alone."

"The drunken hound! The idea of him daring to love you! Justine, I could kill him!"

The horseman swept past the gate, a swift black shadow amid the thunder of hoof-beats, and the lovers drew closer together. Just as he roared past them his whistling ceased and a strong, bold voice shouted:

"Hello, Justine!" He was saluting, in drunken gallantry, the girl whom he believed to be asleep beneath a counterpane near some black window in the little house. The horse shied, his whip swished

through the air and cut across the animal's flank; the ugly snort of the beast mingled with oaths from the rider.

The girl shuddered and placed her hands over her ears; her companion set his teeth and muttered:

"The dog! I wish that horse would throw him and break his neck! He's not fit to live. Justine, if there is a man who will go to hell when he dies, that man is 'Gene Crawley. And he wants you—the hound! The sweetest, gentlest, purest girl in the world! He wants you!"

They forgot the rider, and the clatter of the horse's hoofs died away in the night. The lovers turned slowly toward the house. At the door he stooped and kissed her.

"The last night we are to part like this," he whispered.

She laid both hands upon his face.

"Let us pray to-night, dear, that we may be always as happy as we now are," she said softly.

She opened the door, and the two stood for a moment in the fair light from the cottage lamp. From above him on the door-sill, she laid her fingers in his curly brown hair, and said, half timidly, half joyfully:

"The last night we shall say good-bye like this."

Then she kissed him suddenly and was gone,

blushing and trembling. He looked at the closed door for an instant, and then dropped to his knees and kissed the step on which she had stood.

CHAPTER II.

"LET NOT MAN PUT ASUNDER."

THE next night they were married. In the little cottage there were lights and the revelry known only in country nuptials. The doors and windows were open, and scores of young people in their best clothes flitted in and out, their merry voices ringing with excitement, their faces glowing with pleasure, their eyes sparkling with the mischief peculiar to occasions of the kind. There were the congratulations and the teasings; the timid jests and the coarse ones; the cynical bits of advice from lofty experts; the blushes of prospective brides; the red-faced denials of guilty beaux; the smiles, the winks, and the songs; the feasting and the farewells.

"That boy," Jud Sherrod, and "Cap" Van's daughter, Justine, were to be married. The community would have liked to be glad. Everybody had "allowed" they would be married some day. Now that the day had come, amid the rejoicing there were doubts, such as this:

"They's a mighty nice-appearin' couple, but dinged 'f I see how they're goin' to git along. Jud

ain't got no more bizness workin' on a farm than a hog hez in a telegraft office. Course, his pap was a farmer, but Jud's been off to seminary. He don't give a dodgast fer the farm, nohow, an' I perdict that she'll haf to keep on teachin' school fer a livin'. Course, that little land o' hern might keep 'em goin', but I bet a barrel o' cider 'at Jud won't be wuth a bushel o' corn-husks at runnin' it. He's a dern nice boy, though, an' I'd hate like Sam Patch to see a morgidge put on the place. What she'd orter done wuz to married some big cuss like Link Overshine er Luther Hitchcock. They'd 'a' made somethin' out'n that little eighty up yander, an' she'd never need to worry. Dinged if she ain't put' nigh the purtiest girl I ever see. Looks jest like her ma. 'Member her? Don't see what she ever could see in Jud Sherrod. He cain't do a dasted thing but draw picters. His pap had orter walloped him good an' made him chop wood er somethin', 'stead o' lettin' him go on the way he did. They do say he kin sketch things powerful fine. He tuck off a picter uv Sim Brookses' sucklin' calves that was a daisy, I've hearn. But that ain't farmin' by a dern sight."

Even Jud and Justine had looked forward to the great day with anxious minds. Both realized the importance of the step they were to take, for they

were possessed of a judgment and a keenness uncommon in young and ardent lovers. Justine, little more than a girl in years, knew that Jud was not and never could be a farmer; it was not in him. He knew it as well as she, though he was not indolent; he was far from that. He was ambitious and he was an indefatigable toiler—in art, not of the soil. He was a born artist. By force of circumstances he was a farmer. The tan on his hands and face, the hardness in his palms had not been acquired unwillingly, for he was not a sluggard, nor a grumbler. He plowed, though his thoughts were not of the plowing; he reaped, though his thoughts were not of the harvest.

They had been sweethearts from childhood. They had played together, read together, studied together, and suffered together. It seemed to them that they just grew up to their wedding day, a perfectly natural growth. Had this marriage come five years earlier everything would have been different. Instead of the little cottage, clean, cozy, and poor, there would have been the big white house on the hill, surrounded by maples and oaks; instead of the simple gown of white lawn there would have been a magnificent silk or satin; instead of the sympathy and the somber head-shakings of wedding guests there would have been rejoicing and approval.

To-night, as the little clock on Justine's bureau struck eight, she left her room and met Jud in the narrow hall upstairs. Downstairs could be heard the muffled voices of an expectant crowd, an occasional giggle breaking through the buzz. He kissed her and both were silent, thinking of other homes. One remembered the big white house on the hill, the other the old yellow farmhouse, large and rambling, "over on the pike." To-night they faced the minister in the parlor of one of the lowliest dwellings in the neighborhood. The boy had not an acre of all his father's lands; the girl was poor, at the gates of the famous Van homestead. They were married not in his house, but in hers. The cottage stood in the corner of a thirty-acre farm that had come to her through her grandmother. This was all except memories that the child had to connect her present life with the comfortable days of the past.

Old Mrs. Crane, who lived with Justine in the little cot, met them at the foot of the creaking stairway and threw open the door to the parlor. Before the boy and girl gleamed the faces of a score or more of eager, excited friends. There was hardly a girl in the crowd who was not dressed more expensively than the bride. Justine was proudly aware of the critical, simpering gaze that swept

over her simple gown; she could almost read the exultant thoughts of her guests, as they compared her plain lawn to the ridiculous finery that hid their sunburnt necks, scrawny arms, and perspiring bodies.

Her face was fresh and flushed with happiness, pride—perhaps disdain; their faces had, at least, been washed and lavishly powdered. Most of them wore absurd white gloves over their red arms. Yet they were the élite of the county. There were red dresses, blue dresses, yellow dresses, and there were other dresses in which the colors of the rainbow shone, all made to fit women other than those who wore them. The men, old and young, bearded and beardless, were the most uncouth aristocrats that ever lorded it over a countryside. True, they had put on their store clothes and had blackened their boots and shoes; they had shaved, and they had plastered their hair faultlessly; they had cast aside their quids of tobacco and they were as circumspect as if they were at church.

Justine and Jud stood with clasped hands before the young minister, listening to his lengthy and timely discourse on the blessedness of matrimony. Then came the vows. Their eyes met. The answers! They breathed them—the yes and the yes and the yes—almost unconsciously. Then the

last words—"Whom God hath joined together let not man put asunder!"

For the next two or three hours they were in a whirl of emotions; everything was hazy, uncertain, misty to them. They had taken up each other's burdens, each other's joys for life; they had begun a new existence. She was no longer Justine Van, he was no longer the thoughtless boy. They were husband and wife. The laughter, the jests, the quips, and the taunts of their merry friends were a jangle of discordant sounds, unpleasant and untimely, and kindly as they were meant, unkind. There were aimless hand-shakings, palsied kisses, inane responses to crude congratulations, and it was all over. The guests departed, singing, shouting, and laughing. The last to leave was old Mrs. Crane, Justine's companion for four long years. She was going to live with her brother up near the village. Jud and Justine were to live alone.

Down at the toll-gate, nearly a mile from Justine's home in the direction of the village, a small and select company of loungers spent that evening. The toll-gate, kept by Jim Hardesty and his wife, Matilda, was at the junction of the big gravel pike which led to the county seat and the slim, shady lane that passed Justine's cottage. Here of evenings the "hired hands" of the neighborhood gathered to

gossip, tell lies, and "talk ugly" about the farmers by whom they were employed. On the night of the wedding there were five or six slouchy, sweat-smelling rustics lounging on the porch. The wedding formed the only topic of conversation.

They talked of Justine's good looks and how "they'd liked to be in Jud's boots"; and of the days when old "Cap" Van lived and the bride of the night had not had to teach school; of the days when she rode horses of her own, and went to the city to make purchases instead of to the humble village as now; they talked of her kindly in their rough way. They discussed Jud with enthusiasm. Everybody liked him. His two years at college had not "swelled his head." He was "jest the feller fer Justine Van, an' she got him, too, 'g'inst ever' girl in the township—an' ever' one of 'em had set their caps fer him, too, you bet." The loungers agreed it was "too bad that Jud and Justine was so derned pore, but mebbe they'd make out somehow er 'nother."

They laughed about 'Gene Crawley's affection for Justine Van.

'Gene Crawley! A "hand" over at Martin Grimes' place—a plain, every-day hired man, working for eighteen dollars a month for the meanest, stingiest farmer in Clay Township! He was not

any better than the rest of the hands on the place, "'s fer as learnin' an' manners wuz concerned. Hadn't no more license to be skylarkin' 'round after Justine Van 'n he had after Queen Willimeny. 'S if she'd notice sech a derned cuss as him; allus cussin' an' drinkin' an' fightin'. No 'spectabull girl would want to be saw with him."

About nine o'clock a dark figure approached the toll-gate afoot. It was a man, and he came from the night somewhere to the east, probably from the village of Glenville. There was no mistaking his identity. The heavy, swift tread told the watchers that it was 'Gene Crawley long before he came within the radius of light that shot through the open doorway. Someone in the crowd called out:

"H' are ye, 'Gene! Thought you'd be up to the weddin'."

'Gene did not reply. He strode up to the porch and threw himself into a vacant chair near the window. The light from within shone fairly upon his dark, sullen face, his scowling brow, and his flushed, unshaven cheeks. An ugly gleam was in his black eyes. He had been drinking, but he was not intoxicated. His hickory shirt, dirty and almost buttonless, was open at the throat as if it had been torn that its wearer might save himself from choking. He wore no coat, and his faded, patched

blue overalls were pushed into the tops of his heavy boots. An old straw hat lay where he had cast it behind his chair. The black, coarse hair, rumpled and unkempt, grew low on his scowling forehead. His face was hard and deeply marked, not unlike that of an Indian. The jaw was firm, the chin square and defiant, the mouth broad and cruel, the nose large and straight, the eyes coal-black and set far apart, beneath heavy brows. The arm which rested on the sill was bare to the elbow; it was rugged, with cords of muscle that looked like ropes interlaced. A glimpse of the arm revealed, as if he stood stark naked, the strength of this young Samson. He was a huge, unwieldy man, a little above medium height; he might have weighed one hundred and seventy pounds; but with his square shoulders, broad chest, and an unusually erect carriage for an overworked farm-boy, he looked larger than he really was.

"You ain't got your Sunday-go-to-meetin' close on, 'Gene," commented Jim Hardesty, tilting back in his chair and spitting tobacco juice half way across the road.

"Didn' y' git a bid to the weddin'?" asked Harve Crose, with mock sympathy.

A flush of anger and humiliation reddened the face of Grimes' hired man, but it was gone in a second.

"No; I didn' git no bid," he answered, a trifle hoarsely. "Guess they didn' want me. I ain't good 'nough, 'pears like."

"Seems to me she'd orter ast you, 'Gene. You be'n kinder hangin' 'round an' teasin' her to have you, an' seems no more'n right fer her to have give you a bid to the weddin'," said Doc Ramsey, meaningly. "She'd orter done that, jest to show you why she wouldn' have you, don't y' see?"

Crawley's only reply was a baleful glare.

"How does it feel to be cut out by another feller, 'Gene?" asked Crose tauntingly.

"I'd never let a feller like Jud Sherrod beat my time," added Joe Perkins.

"Course, Jud's been to college and learned how to spoon with the girls, so I guess it's no wonder he ketched Justine. She's jest like all girls, I reckon. Smooth cuss kin ketch 'em all, b'gosh. Never seed it fail yit. Trouble with you, 'Gene, is 'at you—"

'Gene sprang to his feet with an oath so ugly that the jesters shrank back. For several minutes he tramped up and down the porch like a caged animal, cursing hoarsely to himself, his broad shoulders hunched forward as if he were bent on crushing everything before them. Finally he came to a standstill in front of the expectant crowd. The devil was in his face.

"Don't none o' you fellers ever say anything more to me about this. Ef you do I'll break somebody's neck. It's none o' your business how I feel, an' I won't have no more of it. Do y' hear me?" he snarled.

"I on'y ast fer information—" began Crose, apologetically.

"Well, I'll give you some, dang ye! You say I'm cut out, eh! Mebbe I am—mebbe I am! But you'll see—you'll see! I'll make him sorry fer it! He's whupped me this time, but I'll win yet! D' y' hear? I'll win yet!"

His face was almost white under the coat of tan, his eyes glowed, his voice was low and intense. The loungers waited in suspense.

"He thinks he's won! But I'll show him—I'll show him! She's like all women! She kin be won ag'in—she kin love more'n once! You say he's cut me out! Mebbe he has—mebbe he has! But this ain't a marker to the way I'll cut him out. I'll take her away from him, I will, so he'p me God! D' y' hear that? She'll shake him fer me some day, sure 's there's a hell, an' then! Then where'll he be? She'll be mine! Fair 'r foul, I'll have her! I won't give up tell I take her 'way from him! An' she'll come, too; she'll come! She'll leave him, jest like

other women have done, an' then who'll be cut out? Answer, damn ye! Who'll be cut out?"

He was facing them and his lips were almost as white as the gleaming teeth beneath them. For a moment no one dared to reply. At last Doc Ramsey scrambled to his feet.

"Consarn ye, 'Gene Crawley!" he exclaimed. "You cain't stan' up there an' say that 'bout Justine Van! She's a good girl, an' you're a dern hound fer talkin' like thet! They ain't a bad drop o' blood in her body—they ain't a wrong thought in her head, an' you know it. You kin lick me, I know, but dern ef you kin say them things to me. She won't look at you no more'n she'd look at that dog o' Jim's over yander."

'Gene Crawley's arm struck out and Doc Ramsey crashed to the floor of the porch. He lay motionless for a long time. The dealer of the blow stood over him like a wild beast waiting for its prey to move. Not another man in the group lifted a hand against him.

At last he stooped and picked up his hat.

"That's what you'll all git ef you open your heads," he grated. "What I said about her goes!"

He fixed his hat roughly on his head and swung away in the darkness.

In the open door of the cottage down the lane

Jud and Justine stood side by side, her hand in his, long after the last guest had departed. It was near midnight and behind them the lamps flickered and sputtered with the last gasps of waning life. Silhouetted in the long, bright frame of the doorway, the silent lovers presented a picture of a new life begun, youth on the threshold of a new world.

His arm drew her to his breast and her fluttering hands went slowly, gently to his cheeks. He bent and kissed the upturned lips.

Then the door closed and the picture was gone.

Across the road, beside the great oak that sent its branches almost to the little gateway, a man fell away from the fence, upon which, with murder in his heart, he had been leaning. His hands were clasped to his eyes, his strong figure writhed convulsively in the damp grass; his breath came almost in sobs. At last, taking his hands from his hot eyes, he raised his head and looked again toward the cottage. One by one the bright windows grew dark, until at last the house was as black as the night about it. Then he sprang to his feet, clutching blindly at the darkness, uttering inarticulate moans and curses. For the first time in his life he knew a sense of loneliness and despair.

He turned his back to the cottage and fled across the meadow.

CHAPTER III.

JUD AND JUSTINE.

DUDLEY SHERROD was the only son of John Sherrod, who had died about four years before the marriage. Up to the day of his death he was considered the wealthiest farmer in Clay Township. On that day he was a pauper; his lands were no longer his own; his wife and his son were penniless. In an upstairs room of the great old farmhouse, built by his grandfather when the country was new, he blew out his brains, unable to face the ruin that fate had brought to his door.

His father had been a member of the Legislature, and the boy had spent two years in the city, attending a medical college. When the diploma came he went back to the old home and hung out his shingle in quaint little Glenville. In less than a year he brought a bride to the farm—Cora Bloodgood, the daughter of a banker in the capital city of his State. Before the end of another year he was, as heir, owner of all his father's acres. So it was that John and Cora Sherrod began life rich and happy. Their boy was born, grew up a bright

and sprightly lad, and was sent to college. From the rude country schoolhouse and its simple teachings he was sent to the busy university, among city boys and city girls, miserable in ungainly self-consciousness, altogether out of place. He left behind him the country lads and lasses, the tow-heads and the barefoots, and his heart was sore. But in the beginning of his second year the simplicity of his rural heart showed signs of giving way to urban improvements. His strength won for him a place on the football team, and the sense of dignity of this position displaced his self-consciousness and taught him to be interested in the world beyond his home. He began to know something besides the memory of green fields and meadows and clear blue skies.

All these months he was faithful to a slip of a girl down in the country to whom he had feared to utter a word of love. She knew she loved him because she had cried when he went away and had cried when he came back. Letters, stiff and painfully correct as to spelling and chirography, came each week from dear little Justine Van. To her his long letters, homesickness crowding between the lines, although she could not see it, were like messages from paradise. A dozen times a day she read each letter as she sat in her room, or in the hated

schoolroom at Glenville, or in the shady orchard, or in the lonely lane. She longed to have him back at home, to hear his merry laugh, to romp with him as they had romped before he went away to school —but here she blushed and remembered that he was tall now, and dreadfully old and grand, and she was—she was fifteen! Jud thrashed a fellow student one day because he poked fun at an old tin-type of Justine that he happened to see in the boy's room. The victim had laughed at the green bonnet, the long pig-tails, and the wide eyes of the girl in the picture—"just as if they were looking for the photographer's bird, you know."

Near the middle of his second year at college the crash came and the half-dazed boy hurried home. His father was dead and the whole country was telling the stories of his great financial losses. Every dollar, every foot of land had been swept away by reverses arising from investments in Arizona mines. Captain James Van went down in the same disaster. When word reached his home of the suicide of John Sherrod, he was on his way to the barn with a pistol hidden over his heart. Horror and the awakening of courage made him cast the pistol aside and turn to face the blow as a brave man should, with his wife and child behind his back.

Jud and Justine could not at first, and did not for many days, realize the force of the blow. One had lost father as well as home; the other had lost home and had sunk to a depth of poverty that grew more and more appalling as her young mind began to understand. The boy, when he finally grasped the situation, bared his arms and set forth to support himself and his mother by hard work. The shock of the suicide was too great for Mrs. Sherrod. Her reason fled soon after her husband was laid in the grave, but it was a year before death took her to him. During that last year of life she lived in the old place, a helpless invalid, mentally and physically, although the property belonged to another. David Strong held a mortgage on the home place, but he did not foreclose it until she was gone.

For a year Jud cared for his mother, and worked in the fields with David Strong's men at wages of twelve dollars a month. Half of the year's crop Strong gave to the widow of John Sherrod, although not a penny's worth of it was hers by right. After her death Strong and his family moved into the big old house, and Jud Sherrod lived in a room in what had been his home.

Justine Van's grandmother, in her will, left to the girl a thirty-acre piece of ground, half timber,

half cultivated, about a mile from the white house in which the beneficiary was born and which was swallowed up by the great disaster. Bereft of every penny, James Van took his wife and daughter to the miserable little cottage. The girl shouldered as much of the burden of poverty as her young and tender shoulders could carry. She begged for an appointment as teacher in the humble schoolhouse where her a-b-abs had been learned, and for two years and a half before her marriage she had taught the little flock of boys and girls. Especially necessary did this means of earning a livelihood become when, two years after the failure, her father died. Then Mrs. Van followed him, and Justine, not nineteen, was face to face with the world, a trembling, guileless child.

Her wages at the schoolhouse were twenty-five dollars a month, for six months in a year, and the yield of grain from her poorly tilled farm was barely enough to pay the taxes and the help hire. Old Jim Hardesty farmed the place for her, and he robbed her. For six months after the mother's death she lived alone in the cottage, and then the neighbors finally taking the matter in hand and insisting that she be provided with a companion, her old nurse, Mrs. Crane, came to the place. She was shrewd from years of adversity and persuaded Jus-

tine to send Jim Hardesty packing—and that was the hardest duty Justine had ever had to meet.

The discouraged boy, over on David Strong's place, worn thin with hard work and sickness, deprived of every chance, as he thought, to realize his ambitions, found in the girl a sympathetic comrade. Of all the people in his world she was the only one who understood his desires, and could, in a way, share with him the despair that made life as he lived it seem like a narrow cell from which he could look longingly with no hope of escape. Tired and sore from misfortune, these two simple, loving natures turned to each other. His first trembling kiss upon her surprised, parted lips was a treasure that never left her memory. The bloom came to her cheeks, lightness touched her flagging heart, happiness shone through the gloom, and the whole countryside marveled at her growing beauty. This slim, budding maid of the meadow and wood was as fair a bit as nature ever perfected. The sweetness and purity of womanhood undefiled dwelt in her body and soul. No taint of worldliness had blighted her. She was a pure, simple, country girl, ignorant of wile, sinless and trustful.

Justine was like her father, fair faced and straight of form. Her hair was long and reddish-brown, her brow was broad and full, her eyes big

and brown and soft with love, her cheeks smooth and clear. A trifle above the medium height, straight and strong, of slender mold, she was as graceful as a gazelle. Health seemed to glow in the atmosphere about her.

With Jud, too, the realization of love and the feeling that there was something to live for, brought a change. His stooping shoulders straightened, his eyes brightened, his steps became springy. He whistled and sang at his work, took an interest in life, and presently even resumed his drawing. The country folk winked knowingly. The two were constantly together when opportunity afforded, so it soon became common report that he was her "feller, fer sure," and she was his "girl."

One evening, as they sat in the dusk down by the creek, which ran through her bit of pasture land, Jud drew his mother's plain gold ring from his little finger and slipped it upon Justine's third. They were betrothed.

Never were such sweethearts as Jud and Justine. They were lovers, friends, comrades. Her sweet, serious face took a new life, new color at his approach, her dreamy eyes grew softer and more wistful, her low voice more musical. Her soul was his, her life belonged to him, her heart beat only for him. Jud's famished hopes of something be-

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yond the farm found fresh encouragement in her simple, wondering praise. She was his critic, his unconscious mentor. Beneath her untrained eye he sketched as he never sketched before. Looking over his shoulder as he lay stretched upon the grass, she marveled at the skill with which his pencil transferred the world about them to the dearly bought drawing pads, and her enthusiastic little cries of delight were tributes that brought confidence to the heart of the artist.

The girl had scores of admirers. Every boy, every man in the township longed to "make up" to her, but she gave no thought to them. Half a dozen widowers with children asked her to marry them. She and Jud laughed when Eversole Baker besought her to become mother to his nine children, including two daughters older than herself.

But there was one determined suitor, and she feared him with an uncanny dread that knew no rest until she was safely Jud's on the wedding night. That one was Eugene Crawley, drunkard and blasphemer.

Crawley was born in the dense timber land north of Glenville. His father had been a woodchopper, hunter, and fisherman. Hard stories came down to town about Sam Crawley. Of 'Gene, the boy, nothing against his honesty at least could be said.

He was a vile wretch when drinking, little better when sober, but he was as honest as the sun.

He had gone to school with Jud and Justine when they were little "tads," and his rough affection for her began when they were mastering the "first reader." He and Jud had fought over her twice and each had been a victor. The girl despised him, from childhood, and he knew it. Still, he clung to the hope that he could take her away from his rival. He dogged her footsteps, frightened her with his mad protestations, and finally alarmed her by his threats. The day before the wedding he had met her as she left the schoolhouse and had sworn to kill Jud Sherrod. She did not tell Jud of this, nor did she tell him that she had pleaded with Crawley to spare her lover's life. Had she told Jud all this she would have been obliged to tell him how the brute had suddenly burst into tears and promised he would not harm Jud if he could help it.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. HARDESTY'S CHARITY.

FOR many days after their marriage Jud and Justine were obliged to endure coarse jokes, kindly meant if out of tune with their sensitive minds. Happy weeks sped by, weeks replete with the fullness of joy known only to the newly wedded. Days of toil, that had once been long and irksome, now were flitting seasons of anticipation between real joys. At dusk he came home with eyes glowing in the delight that knows no fatigue, with a heart leaping with the love that is young and eager, and blood carousing under the intoxication of passion's wine. In the kitchen door of the little cot, no longer dismal in its weather-worn plainness, there always stood the slim, supple girl, her heart leaping with the eagerness to be clasped in his arms. She was growing into perfect womanhood, perfect in figure, perfect in love, perfect in all its mysteries. Her whole life before now appeared as a dreamless sleep to her; the present was the beginning of a divine dream that softens the rest of life into mellow forgetfulness.

She walked with him in the hayfield, from choice, delighted to toil near him, to breathe the same air, to endure the same sun, to enjoy the same moments of rest beneath the great oaks, to drink from the same brown jug of spring water, to sing, to laugh, to play with him. It was not work. Then came the harvesting, the thrashing, and the fall sowing. Six months were soon gone and still these children played like cupids. Other married people in the neighborhood, whose honeymoons had not been more than a week old before they began to show callous spots, wondered dumbly at the beautiful girl who grew prettier and straighter instead of turning sour, frowsy, and bent under the rigors of connubial joy—as they had found it. They could not understand how the husband could be so blithe and cheery, so upstanding and strong, and so devoted. The wives of the neighborhood pondered over the latter condition. The husbands did not deem it worth while or expedient to wonder—they merely called Jud a "dinged shif'less boy that'll wake up some time er 'nother an' understan' more 'n he does now." Yet they had to admit that Jud was conducting the little farm faultlessly, even though he did find time to moon with his wife, to bask in the sunshine of her love, to wander over

wood and field with her beside him, sketching, sketching, eternally sketching.

Rainy days and Sundays brought hours of sweet communion to the happy, simple young couple. So thoroughly were they devoted to one another that their lack of attention to the neighbors was the source of more or less indignation on the part of those who "knowed that Jud and her hadn't no right to be so infernal stuck-up." And yet these same discontents were won over in the briefest conversation with the pair when they chanced to meet. Even the most snappish and envious were overcome by the gentle good humor, the proud simplicity of these young sweethearts, who saw no ugliness, who knew no bitterness, who found life and its hardships no struggle at all.

They were desperately poor, but they made no complaint. The vigor of life was theirs, and they sang as they suffered, looking forward with bright, confident eyes to the East of their dreams, in which their sun of fortune was to rise.

Justine was to have the school another year, beginning in October, after a six-months' vacation. Jud's pride revolted at first against this decision of hers, but she overcame every argument, and he loved her more than ever for the share she was taking in the dull battle against poverty. The

land he tilled was not fertile; it had been overworked for years. The crops were growing thinner; the timber was slowly falling beneath the stove-wood ax; the meadow plot was almost barren of grass. It was not a productive "thirty," and they knew it. There was a bare existence in it when crops were good, but there was, as yet, no mortgage to face. Jud owned a team of horses, and Justine two cows and a dozen hogs. They had no other vehicle than a farm wagon, old and rattling. When they went to the village it was in this wagon; when to church, they walked, although the distance was two miles, so tender was their pride.

Little Justine was the politic one. Jud was proud, and was ever ready to resent the kindly offices of neighbors. Had it been left to him, young Henry Bossman would have been summarily dismissed when he offered to help Jud stack the hay, "jes' fer ole times' sake." It was Justine who welcomed poor, awkward Henry, and it was she who sent him away rejoicing over a good deed, determined to help "Jud and Justine ever' time he had a chanst."

It was she who accepted the proffer to thrash their thirty acres of wheat, free of charge, from David Strong, stopping off one day as his separator

and engine passed by. She thanked him so graciously that he went his way wondering whether he was indebted to them or they to him. When Harve Crose offered to get their mail at the cross-roads post-office every day and leave it at the cottage gate as he rode by, she thanked him so beautifully that he felt as though she ought to scold him when he was late on rare occasions. Doc Ramsey, the man who was knocked down by 'Gene Crawley at the toll-gate one night, helped Jud build a rail fence over half a mile long, and said he "guessed he'd call it square if Jud 'd give him that picter he drawed of Justine summer 'fore las'. Kinder like to have that picter, 'y ginger; skeer the rats away with," ending with a roar of apologetic laughter at his homely excuse.

'Gene Crawley was never to be seen in the little lane. Sullen and savage, he frequented the toll-gate, but not so much as formerly. He drank more than ever, and it was said that Martin Grimes had taken him out of jail twice at the county seat, both times on a charge of "drunk and disorderly conduct." It seemed that he avoided all possible chance of meeting Jud and his wife. Curious people speculated on the outcome of his increasing moroseness, and not a few saw something tragic in the scowl that seldom left his swarthy brow.

For many weeks after her marriage Justine dreamed of the fierce eyes and the desperate threats of this lover, and the only bar to complete happiness was the fear that 'Gene Crawley would some day wreak vengeance upon her husband. As the weeks wore away, this fear dwindled, until now she felt secure in the hope that he had forgotten her. And yet, when his name was mentioned in her presence, she could not restrain the sudden leaping of her heart or the troubled look that widened her tender brown eyes. When Jud bitterly alluded to him and assured her, with more or less boyish braggadocio, that he would whip him if he ever so much as spoke to her or him again, she felt a dread that seemed almost a presentiment of evil. She did not fear Crawley for herself, but for Jud.

'Gene's boast before the men at the toll-gate created a sensation in the usually unruffled community. The blow that felled Doc Ramsey was universally condemned, yet no man had the courage to take to task the man who delivered it. The story of his mad declaration concerning Justine spread like wildfire. Of course, no one believed that his boast could be carried out, or attempted, for that matter; but, as gossip traveled, the substance of his vow increased. Within a week the tale had grown in vileness until Crawley was

credited with having given utterance to the most unheard-of assertions. Black and foul as his actual words had been, they were tame and weak in comparison with the things the honest farmers and their wives convinced themselves and others that he had said.

In the course of time the incident which made historical her wedding night reached the ears of Justine Sherrod. She had seen 'Gene but two or three times in the four months that intervened between that time and the day on which she heard the wretched story from Mrs. Hardesty—an honest soul who had heard 'Gene's words plainly, and was therefore qualified to exaggerate if she saw fit. Once the girl passed him in the lane near the toll-gate. He was leaning on the fence at the roadside as she passed. She had seen him looking at her hungrily as she approached, but when she lifted her eyes again, his broad back was toward her and he was looking across the fields. There was something foreboding in the strong shoulders and corded brown arms that bore down upon the fence in an evident effort at self-control. She felt the panic which makes one wish to fly from an unknown danger. Not daring to look back, she walked swiftly by, possessed of the fear that he was following, that he was ready to clutch her

from behind. But he stood there until she turned into the gate a half mile down the lane.

It remained for Mrs. Hardesty to tell Justine the story. The bony wife of the toll-gate keeper carried her busy presence up to the cottage one afternoon late in September, and found the young wife resting after a hard, hot ironing. Her pretty face was warm and rosy, her strong arms were bare to the shoulder, her full, deep breast was heaving wearily beneath the loose blue-and-white figured calico. As Mrs. Hardesty came up the path from the gate she could not resist saying to herself, as she looked admiringly but with womanly envy upon the straight figure leaning against the door-casing, fanning a hot face with an old newspaper:

"I don' blame 'Gene Crawley er enny other man fer wantin' to have her. They ain't no one like her in the hull State, er this country, either, fer that matter."

Justine greeted her cordially.

"How do you do, Mrs. Hardesty? Aren't you almost baked in this sun? Come into the shade and sit down. I'll get you a dipper of water and a fan."

"Don't put yourself out enny—don't trouble yourself a bit now, Jestine. Jes' git me a sup o'

water an' I'll be all hunky-dory. I don't mind the sun very much. My, I'm glad to set down in the shade, though. Never saw the roads so dusty, did you? Thank ye, Jestine—much obliged. You must have a grand spring here to git such fine water. It's as cold, purt' nigh, as the ice water you git up to town. Set down, my dear; you look hot an' tired. I know you look nice standin' up like that, but you'll be a heap sight more comfortable if you set down an' rest them tired legs o' your'n. Where's Jed?"

"He's gone over to Hawkins's blacksmith shop on the pike to have Randy shod. She cast two shoes yesterday," explained the girl, sitting on the doorstep. "Do you want to see him about anything in particular, Mrs. Hardesty? He said he'd be home by six."

"No; I jes' ast. Thought ef he was aroun' I'd like to see his good-lookin' face fer a minnit er two. I reckon, though, he don't look at other women when you're aroun'," tittered the visitor, who was not a day under sixty.

"Oh, yes, he does," laughed Justine, turning a shade rosier. "He's getting tired of seeing me around all the time. You see, I'm an old married woman now."

"Good heavens, child, wait tell you've been mar-

ried thirty-nine years like I have, an' then you kin begin to talk about gittin' tired o' seein' certain people all the time. I know I could see Jim Hardesty ef I was as blind as a bat. I kin almost tell how menny hairs they is in his whiskers."

"Well, how many, for instance?" asked Justine gaily.

"Two hundred and ninety-seven," answered Mrs. Jim, promptly and positively. She regaled the young wife with a long and far from original dissertation on married life as she had encountered it with James. Finally she paused and changed the subject abruptly, leaping to a question that had doubtless been on her mind for days.

"Have you saw much of 'Gene Crawley lately, Jestine?" The question was so unexpected that the girl started, and stammered in replying.

"No; very little. I don't believe I've seen him more than twice in several months. Is he still working for Martin?"

"Oh, yes. They was some talk o' his goin' over to Rumley to work in a saw-mill, but seems as though he can't leave this part o' the country." After a moment's hesitation, she went on boldly, smiling with the awkwardness of one who is determined to learn something at any cost. "I s'posed he'd been comin' 'roun' here quite a little."

"Coming here, Mrs. Hardesty?" cried the girl in surprise. "Why, he'll never come here. He and Jud are not friends and he knows I don't like him. Whatever put that into your head?"

"Oh, I dunno," said Mrs. Hardesty evasively. "I heerd somethin' 'bout his sayin' he was a great frien' o' your'n, so I thought, like as not, he was—er—that is, he might 'a' drapped in onct in awhile, you know—jes' like fellers will, you know."

"Well, you may be sure 'Gene will never come here."

"He wouldn't be welcome, I take it."

"I don't like to say that anybody would not be welcome, Mrs. Hardesty. I hardly think he'd *care* to come," said the girl nervously.

"Him an' Jed have had some words, hain't they? Never been friends sence they was boys, I've heered. Do you think he's afeared o' Jed?"

"Why should he be afraid of Jud? So long as each attends to his own business there is nothing to be afraid of. They're not good friends, that's all."

"Well, 'Gene's been doin' some ugly talkin'," said the visitor doggedly.

"What do you mean?" asked Justine. A strange chill seized her heart—a fear for Jud.

"He's been very unwise to say the things he has.

I tole Jim Hardesty ef they ever got to Jed's ears 'Gene 'd pay purty dearly fer them. But Jim says 'twouldn't be good fer Jed ef he tackled 'Gene. He's wuss'n pison."

"Why, Mrs. Hardesty, I don't—I don't know what you're talking about," cried the poor girl. "What has 'Gene been saying?"

"Oh, it wouldn't be right fer me to git mixed up in it. It's none o' my funeral," said Mrs. Hardesty, now in the full delight of keeping a listener tortured with suspense. It was a quarter of an hour before she could be induced to relate the very tales she had come to tell in the first place.

" 'Gene tole the boys that night that he'd made love to you ever sence you was children and that he could tell Jed Sherrod some things ef he was a mind to. He said he could take you away from him any time, an' that Jed 'd have to stay 'roun' home purty close ef he wanted to be sure o' you."

"Oh, oh, oh!" moaned the dumfounded girl.

"An' then he went on to say that you'd promised to—to—well--well, to leave Jed some time an' go away with him. That's the mildest way to put it. I couldn't say it the way 'Gene did. Don't look so put-out about it, Jestine—really, you look

like you want to faint. Shell I git you some water?"

"Did—did he say all of that?" Justine whispered hoarsely.

"Yes, he did. I heered him. I was in the house an'——"

"Mrs. Hardesty, don't tell me any more. I cannot bear it. How could he have said it—how could he have been so mean?" she wailed, struggling to her feet.

"Of course, they wasn't any truth in what 'Gene said," Mrs. Hardesty volunteered, but the declaration bore distinct marks of a question. Justine's eyes blazed, her body trembled, her lips quivered. Never had any one seen such a look upon that sweet, gentle face.

"No!" burst from her lips so fiercely that Mrs. Jim's eyes wavered and fell. "No! And everybody knows it! How can you ask?"

"I didn't ask—you know I didn't, Jestine——" stammered the guest.

"You *did* ask. God forgive 'Gene Crawley for those awful lies—God forgive him! Oh, Matilda, how could he—how could he have said such things? I never did him any wrong——"

"Jed ought to kill him—the mean snake! He

ought to go right over to Martin Grimes's an'——" began Mrs. Hardesty excitedly.

"No, no! He must not know!" cried Justine, with a new terror. She clutched Mrs. Hardesty by the shoulders so that the old lady winced. "Jud must never know! Don't you see how it would end? There would be a murder—a murder! Jud would kill him. Let it be as it is; I can stand it—yes, I can! We must keep it from him. You will help me, won't you? You will see that nobody goes to Jud with this awful story—I know you will! Oh, God! They would fight and—one of them would be killed. How can we keep Jud from hearing?"

Mrs. Hardesty stared up at her, and after a moment laid a hand upon the clinging one upon her shoulder.

"You are right," she agreed. "Jed mus' never be tole. Him an' 'Gene would settle it, an' I'm afeard fer Jed's sake. 'Gene's so vicious like."

CHAPTER V.

WHEN THE CLASH CAME.

DESPITE her apparent cheerfulness, Jud could but note the ever-recurring look of trouble in her eyes. Those wistful eyes, when they were not merry with smiles, were following him with an anxious look like that of a faithful dog. Sometimes he came upon her suddenly and found her staring into space. At such times he saw indignation in the soft brown eyes, or wrath, or terror. He wondered and his soul was troubled. Was she unhappy? Was she tired of him? He thought of asking her to confide in him, but his simple heart could not find courage to draw forth the confession he feared might hurt him endlessly.

Early in October she resumed her work in the schoolhouse. There was not an evening or a noon that did not see her hurrying home, dreading that 'Gene and Jud had met. One day when she saw 'Gene gallop past the schoolhouse, coming from the direction of the farm, she dismissed the school early and ran almost all the way home. When Jud met her near the gate she was sobbing with

joy. He never forgot the kisses she burnt upon his lips.

How she loathed and feared 'Gene Crawley! She had dismal nightmares in which he was strangling her husband. In her waking hours she dreamed of the dreadful boast he had made. One night she was startled by the fear that people might believe the words the wretch had uttered.

One Friday evening they were coming home across the meadow from the Bossman farm. The sun was almost below the ridge of trees in the west and long shadows darkened the edges of the pasture land. The evening was cool and bright, and they were as happy as children. Reaching the little creek which ran through a corner of Justine's land, not far from the house, they sat down to watch the antics of two sportive calves. Peace was in their hearts, quiet in the world about them. She was like a delighted child as she laughed with him at the inane caperings of the calves, those poor little clowns in spots and stripes. He looked more often at her radiant, joyous face than at their entertainers, and his heart throbbed with the pride of possessing her.

Suddenly she gasped and he felt her hand clasp his arm with the grip of a vise. A glare of horror drove the merriment from her eyes.

"It's 'Gene Crawley!" she whispered. "He's coming this way. Oh, Jud!"

"What's the matter, Justine? He won't hurt you while I'm here. Let him come. Dear, don't look like that!" he laughed.

Crawley was approaching from down the creek, walking rapidly and glancing covertly toward the house. It was evident he had not seen the couple on the bank.

"Let us go in, Jud. *Please* do! I don't want to see him," she begged.

"I'd like to know what in thunder he's doing in our pasture," growled Jud, with a sudden flame of anger.

"Maybe he's drunk and has lost his way. He'll find the way out, Jud. Come to the house—quick!" She was on her feet and was dragging him up.

"You go in, Justine, if you want to. I'm going to find out what he's doing here. This isn't a——"

"No, no! You must not stay—you must not have words with him. If you stay, I'll stay! Won't you please come in, Jud?" she implored; but his eyes were not for her. They were glaring angrily at the trespasser, who, seeing them, had stopped in some confusion twenty feet away.

"Do you think I'm afraid of the derned scoundrel?" he demanded, loud enough for 'Gene to hear. The man down on the bank put his hand out and steadied himself against a sapling. For an instant his black eyes shot fire toward Sherrod, but turned away when they met the wild, dark eyes of the girl. He had not been drinking and he was truly surprised by the meeting. There was a stillness for a moment. The two men again glared at one another, all the hatred in their hearts coming to the surface. The girl was suffocating with the knowledge that she could do nothing to stay the catastrophe.

"Get off this place and don't you ever step your foot on here again," said Jud savagely. Justine's hand fell tremblingly from his rigid arm and she looked a mute appeal to 'Gene, who, still holding to the sapling, was trying to control his rage.

"I was jest takin' a short cut to Bossman's," he began, hoarsely, through his teeth. "I'll git off yer place, if you say so. I didn't think you'd mind my cuttin' off a mile er so. Mrs. Grimes's baby's sick an'——"

"You needn't explain. Get out—that's all!"

"Oh, Jud," moaned the girl helplessly.

"Don't be afraid, Justine. I won't hurt your doll baby. I'll git off yer place. If it wasn't fer

you, though, I'd pound his head into dog meat," sneered 'Gene.

"You would, would you? You're a liar, dem you! A liar! Are you coward enough to take that?" cried Jud, taking a step forward. She threw her arms about him and tried to drag him away.

"Let go, Justine!" he shouted. "How can I protect myself with you hanging—let go, I say!" She was stunned by the first angry words he had ever spoken to her. Her arms dropped and she staggered back.

"Oh, God! Oh, God!" she half whispered. "Jud, Jud, don't! He will kill you!"

"Let him try it! Justine, dear, I'm no coward, and I owe him a licking, anyhow. Now's as good a time as any other. Go to the house, dear—it won't do for you to see it," said her husband, very pale and breathing heavily. He was throwing his coat to the ground where his hat already lay.

"You must not—you shall not fight, Jud! Do you want to kill me? Mrs. Hardesty says he is a devil! Don't, don't, don't, Jud! If you love me, don't fight him, Jud!" She threw herself between the men. Crawley had not moved from his tracks, but the wild glare of the beast was fighting its way to his eyes. He was fast losing control. Try as

he would he could not retreat; he could not turn coward before his old enemy.

"Will you fight, 'Gene Crawley?" demanded Jud, over his shoulder. "Or will you run like a whipped pup?"

In a second Crawley's coat was off and he was rolling up his sleeves. Jud pushed Justine aside.

"You'd better go to the house," 'Gene said to her. "It ain't right fer you to see us fight. I didn't want to, remember, but, dern him, he can't call me a coward. I'll fight him till I'm dead."

"We'll settle up old scores, too," said Jud. "You've annoyed Justine and you ain't fit to breathe the same air as she does."

"Damn you, Jud Sherrod, I keer as much fer her as you do. I'd die fer her, if she'd let me. You took her from me an' we've got to have it out now. You kin kill me, but you cain't make me say I don't love her!"

"I despise you, 'Gene Crawley! Oh, how I hate you!" cried the girl. "I've always hated you!"

"I know it! I know it! You needn't throw it up to me! But I'll make you sorry fer it, see if I don't——"

"Stop that! Don't you talk that way to my wife! Are you ready to fight?" cried Jud, advanc-

ing. She made a clutch at his arm and then sank back powerless against the great oak.

"As soon as she goes to the house," replied the other.

"Go to the house, Justine," cried Jud impatiently, but she did not move.

"I'll stay right here!" she said mechanically. "If he murders you, I'll kill him."

Crawley ground his teeth and backed away.

"I won't fight before her. 'Tain't right, Jud, 'n you know it. Le's go over to the lane," he said.

"If she's bound to stay, let her stay. And I want her to see me lick you! She's a brave girl; you needn't worry so dern much. Why don't you want to fight before her?"

"'Cause I'll git mad an' I'll say things she ortn't to hear. I don't want her to hear me cuss an' go on like that. I cain't help cussin' an'——"

"Oh, you're backin' out!" sneered Jud, and he made a rush at his adversary. Before 'Gene could prevent it, a heavy blow landed on his neck and he went to the ground. Justine saw and her heart throbbed with joy. As the man fell she turned her back upon the thrilling scene, insanely throwing her arms about the oak as if to claim its protection.

But Crawley was not conquered by that blow: He was on his feet in an instant, his face livid with rage, his mouth twitching with pain. There were tears in his black eyes, but they were tears of fury. With a bull-like rush he was upon Sherrod. The girl heard the renewed struggling and turned her face in alarm, still clinging to the tree. Fascinated beyond the power of movement, she watched the combat. Her eyes never left Jud's white, convulsed face, and she prayed, prayed as she had never prayed in her life.

Jud was the taller, but 'Gene was the heavier. Almost at the beginning of the hand-to-hand struggle their shirts were stripped from their bodies. Both were well muscled—one clean, wiry, and like a tiger, the other like a Greek Hercules. One had the advantage of a quick brain and a nimble strength, offsetting the brute-like power and slower mind of the other. Never in her life had Justine seen two strong men fight.

Sherrod's coolness returned the instant he dealt the first mad blow. Neither knew the first rudiment of the boxer's art, but he was the quicker witted, the more strategic. He knew that 'Gene's wild swings would fell him if he allowed them to land, so he avoided a close fight, dodging away and rushing in with the quickness of a cat. He

was landing light blows constantly on the face of his foe, and was escaping punishment so surprisingly well that a confident smile twitched at the corners of his mouth. Crawley, blinded by anger and half stunned by the constant blows, wasted his strength in impotent rushes. Jud was not in reach when he struck those mighty, overbalancing blows.

"Don't be afraid, Justine," panted Jud; "he can't hurt me."

"I can't, eh?" roared 'Gene savagely. "You'll see!" And there followed a storm of oaths.

In spite of herself, the girl could not turn her eyes away. The fierceness, the relentless fury of the fighters fascinated her. They were so quick, so strong, so savage that she could see but one end—death for one or the other. Their panting sounded like the snarl of dogs, their rushing feet were like the trampling of cattle, in their faces murder alone was dominant. She prayed that some one might come to separate them. In her terror she even feared that her husband might win. Jud the victor—a murderer! If only she could call for help! But her tongue was like ice, her voice was gone. Murder came into her own heart. Could she have moved from the tree she would have tried to kill 'Gene Crawley. Rather be the slayer her-

self than Jud. She even thought of the hanging that would follow Jud's deed.

Gradually 'Gene's tremendous strength began to gain ascendency. His face was bleeding from many cuts, his white shoulders were covered with blood from a lacerated lip, but his great muscles retained their power. Jud was gasping. The girl began to see in his dulling eyes that the tide was turning. An unconscious shriek came with the conviction that her loved one was losing. She saw the triumphant gleam in 'Gene's eyes, recognized the sudden increase of energy in his attack.

"'Gene! 'Gene!" she tried to cry, but her throat was in the clutch of a terror so great that the appeal was no more than a whisper.

An instant later Crawley succeeded in doing what he had tried to accomplish for ten minutes. He clinched with his tired antagonist, and all Jud's skill was beaten down. The big arms closed about his shoulders and waist, and a strong leg locked the loser's knee. Jud bent backward. They swayed and writhed in that deadly embrace, Jud striking savagely upon the unprotected face of his foe, 'Gene forcing a resolute hand slowly toward Jud's throat. Jud's blows made no impression upon the brutal power of the man, whose burning,

wide-staring eyes saw only the coveted throat, as a beast sees its prey.

A strangling cry came from Jud's lips as the fingers touched his throat. He knew it was all over. He was being crushed—he was helpless. If he could only escape that hand! The fingers closed down upon his neck; the hot breath of his foe poured into his face; the big tree in front of him seemed suddenly to whirl upside down; something was spinning in his head. As they turned he caught a glimpse of Justine still standing at the tree. He tried to call out to her to help him—to save him—help! But there was no sound except a gurgle. His hands tore at the merciless thing in his throat. He must tear it away quickly or he would—he was suffocating! He was blind! He felt himself crashing for miles and miles down a precipice.

Justine saw them plunge to the foot-torn turf, 'Gene above. Beneath she saw the agonized face of her husband, her life, her world. With a rush those awful dreams came back to her and she screamed aloud.

"'Gene!"

Her voice roused the reason of the man, and his blood-shot eyes, for the first time, sought the object that stood paralyzed, immovable against the tree.

"I'll kill him!" he panted malignantly.

"Mercy, 'Gene! Mercy! For my sake!" she moaned. She tried to throw herself upon her knees before him, but her forces were benumbed. The look in her eyes brought the conqueror to his senses. His eyes, still looking into hers, lost their murderous glare and his knotted fingers drew slowly away from the blue neck.

He moved his knee from the other's breast and sank away from him, half lying upon the grass, his heaving body clear of her loved one. The action brought life to the girl.

With a cry she threw herself beside Jud's rigid figure.

"He is dead! Jud! Jud!" she wailed. "Don't look like that!"

Crawley raised himself from the ground, bewildered and dumb. To his brain came the knowledge that he had killed a man. Terror supplanted fury in his closing eyes, a pallor crept over his swarthy face. For the first time he looked into the wide eyes in the strangled face. He did not hear the cries of the woman; he heard only the gasping of that throttled man as they had plunged to the ground.

"I hope I haven't—haven't killed him," struggled through his bleeding lips, tremulously.

"He's dead!" Like a hunted beast he looked about for some place in which to hide, for some way to escape. "They'll hang me! They'll lynch me!" He leaped to his feet and with a yell turned to plunge across the fields toward the woods.

But the reaction had come upon him. His strength was gone. His knees gave way beneath him and he dropped helplessly to the ground, his eyes again falling upon the face of his victim. Trembling in every nerve, he tried to look away, but could not.

Suddenly he started as if struck from behind. His intense eyes had seen a quiver on Jud's lips, a convulsive twitching of the jaws; his ears caught the sound of a small, choking gasp. The world cleared for him. Jud was not dead!

"He's alive!" burst from his lips. He flung the convulsed form of the girl from the breast of the man who was struggling back to life.

As he raised the prostrate man's head, overjoyed to see the blackness receding, to hear the gasp now grow louder and faster, a heavy body struck him and something like a steel trap tightened on his neck. Writhing backward he found the infuriated face of the girl close to his. Her hands were upon his throat.

"You killed him and I'll kill you!" she hissed in his ear, and he knew she was mad! It was but a short struggle; he overpowered her and held her to the ground. She looked up at him with such a malevolent glare that he cowered and shivered. Those tender eyes of Justine Van!

"He ain't dead!" he gasped. "Be quiet, Justine! For God's sake, be quiet! Look! Don't you see he's alive? I'll help you bring him to—I won't tech him again! Be quiet an' we'll have him aroun' all right in a minute! Lookee! He's got his eyes closed! I'll git some water!"

He released her and staggered down the bank to the little stream. He heard her scream with the discovery that her husband was breathing. In his nervous haste, inspired by fear that Jud might die before he could return, the victor made half a dozen futile efforts before he could scoop up a double handful of water from the creek.

When he reached Jud's side again, he found that she was holding his head in her lap and was rubbing his throat and breast. The purple face was fast growing white and great heaving gasps came from the contracted throat. 'Gene dashed the water in his face, only to receive from her a cry of anger and a look of scorn so bitter that it made her

face unrecognizable. He shrank back and in rebellious wonder watched her dry the dripping face.

For many minutes they remained as a tableau, she alone speaking. All her heart was pouring itself out in the loving words that were meant for Jud's ears alone. His ears could not hear them, but 'Gene Crawley's did, and his face grew black with jealousy. He could not tear himself away; he stood there, rigid, listening to phrases of love for another that mingled with words of hatred for him. He could not believe it was gentle Justine Van who was pouring out those wild words. At last he passed his unsteady hand across his eyes and spoke.

"I—I guess I'll be goin', Justine. Hope Jud'll not——" he began nervously. She turned upon him.

"You! You here? Why don't you go? For God's sake, go, and don't let me see your face again as long as I live!" she cried. "Don't stand there and let him see you when he comes to. The blood is terrible! Go away!"

He wiped the blood from his face, conscious for the first time that it was there. Then he tore down to the brook and bathed his swollen face, scrubbing the stains from his broad chest and arms. Going back, he quickly put on his coat, ashamed of his

nakedness. Then he picked up Jud's coat and threw it to her, feeling a desire, in spite of all, to help her in some way. She did not glance toward him, and he saw the reason. Jud's eyes were conscious and were looking up into hers, dumb and bewildered. With a muttered oath 'Gene started away, taking a dozen steps down the creek before a sudden reversal of mind came over him. He stopped and turned to her, and something actually imploring sounded in his voice.

"Cain't I carry him to the house fer you?" he asked.

"Oh!" she cried, turning a terrified face toward him and shielding Jud with her body. "Don't you dare come near him! Don't you touch him! You dog!"

A snarl of rage escaped his lips.

"I s'pose you'll try to have me arrested, won't you? He'd 'a' killed me if he could, an' I didn't kill him jest because you ast me not to. But I s'pose that won't make no difference. You'll have the constable after me. Well, lookee here! All the constables in Clay township cain't take me, an' I won't run from 'em, either. I'll kill the hull crowd! Go on an' have me arrested if you want to. You c'n tell that husband o' your'n that I let him go fer your sake, but if he ever forces me

into a fight ag'in all hell cain't save him. You tell him to go his way an' I'll go mine. As fer you—well, I won't say what I'll do!"

"Oh, I'm not afraid of you!" she cried defiantly. He strode away without another word. From afar, long afterwards, he saw her assist Jud to his feet and support him as he dragged himself feebly toward the house.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GIRL IN GRAY.

FOR days after the fight Jud caught himself stealing surreptitious glances at his wife, with the miserable feeling that some time he would take her unawares and detect scornful pity in her eyes. He was sure she could not respect a man who had been forced to submit to defeat, especially after he had vaingloriously forced the conflict upon an unwilling foe.

But Justine loved him more deeply than ever. In her eyes he was a hero. For her sake he had fought a desperate man in the face of certain defeat.

At the house as she tenderly bathed his swollen face, "Jud," she said, "you won't fight him again, will you?" A lump rose in his throat. He felt that she was begging him to desist merely because she knew his shameful incompetency.

"You won't fight him again, will you?" she repeated earnestly.

"I can't whip him, Justine," he said humbly. "I thought I could. How you must despise me!"

"Despise you! Despise *you!* Oh, how I love

you, Jud!" she cried. He looked into her eyes, fearing to see a flicker of dishonesty, but none was there.

"I won't fight him until I know I can lick him fair and square. It may be never, but maybe I'll be man enough some day. He's too much for me now. He'd have killed me if it hadn't been for you, dear. Good God, Justine, I thought I was dying. You don't know how terrible it was!"

The story of the fight was soon abroad. The fact that Jud's face bore few signs of the conflict struck the people as strange. 'Gene had told wondrous tales of his victory. On the other hand, 'Gene's face was a mass of cuts and bruises. It was hard for them to believe, but the farmers soon found themselves saying that Jud Sherrod had whipped 'Gene Crawley. Even when Jud acknowledged that 'Gene had whipped him, every one said that Jud was so magnanimous that he "couldn't crow over 'Gene."

"Now, mebby 'Gene Crawley'll take back what he said 'bout Jed an' Jestine las' spring," said James Hardesty, down at the toll-gate, in the presence of a large audience. "He'll keep his dern mouth shet now, I reckon. He cain't go 'roun' here talkin' like that 'bout our women folks. Gosh dern him, ef he ever opened his head 'bout my

wife I'd knock him over into Butter township, Indiany. What'n thunder's the use bein' afeared o' 'Gene Crawley? He's a big blow an' he cain't lick nobody 'nless he gits in a crack 'fore the other feller's ready. Good gosh, ef I was as young as some o' you fellers, I'd had him licked forty-seven times 'fore this."

So 'Gene's reputation as a fighter suffered. But not for long. Harve Crose, Joe Perkins, and Link Overshine undertook, on separate occasions, to "take it out'n his hide" for old-standing grievances, and 'Gene reëstablished himself in their estimation. Link Overshine was in bed for a week afterwards.

The winter passed rather uneventfully. In a few of the simpler country gatherings Jud and Justine took part, but poverty kept them pretty closely at home. The yield of grain had not been up to the average and prices were low. It was only by skimping almost to niggardliness that they managed to make both ends meet during the last months of the winter. Justine's school-teaching was their salvation, notwithstanding the fact that the township was usually in arrears. Jud chopped wood for an extra dollar now and then. Justine made frocks for herself.

She wore plain colors and plain material. The

other girls wondered why it was that Justine Van—they always called her Justine Van—looked "so nice in them cheap little calicos." The trimness and daintiness of her dress was refreshing in a community where the taste of woman ran to ribbons, rainbows, and remnants. No girl in the neighborhood considered herself befittingly gowned for parade unless she could spread sail with a dozen hues in the breeze, the odor of perfume in the air, and unblushable pink in her cheeks. Society in Clay township could never be accused of color-blindness. The young gallants, in their store clothes, were to be won by ribbons and rouge, and, as the sole object of the girls was to get married and have children, the seasons apparently merged in an everlasting Eastertide. Justine, then, aroused curiosity. In the winter she wore a rough black coat and a featherless fedora. In the spring her modest gowns would have been sniffed at had they covered the person of any one less dainty. A single rose in her dark hair, a white trifle at her throat, or a red ribbon somewhere, made up her tribute to extravagance.

Jud sketched her adoringly. He had scores of posings even. When spring came and they began to plant, in the midst of privation they found time to be happy. It was on one of their Sunday-after-

noon sketching expeditions that an incident occurred which was to change the whole course of their lives. They had walked several miles across the hills, through leafy woodland, to Proctor's Falls. Here the creek wriggled through a mossy dell until it came to a sudden drop of twenty feet or more, into a pool whose shimmering surface lay darkly in the shade of great trees that lined the banks. It was one of the prettiest spots in the country, and Jud had long meant to try his skill in sketching it.

This day he sat far down the ravine, facing the Falls, and rested his back against a tree. She nestled beside him, leaning against his shoulder, watching with proud eyes the hand that fashioned the picture. To her, his art was little short of the marvelous; to a critic, it would have shown crudities enough, though even the faults were those of genius. Her eye followed his pencil with a half-knowing squint, sending an occasional glance into Nature's picture up the glen as if seeing blemishes in the subject rather than in the work of the artist.

"What a pity there is not more water coming over the rock," she said regretfully. "And that log would look better if it were turned upside down, don't you think, Jud? Goodness, how nat-

ural you have made it, though. I don't see how you do it."

Presently she ventured, somewhat timidly: "Don't you think you might sell some of your pictures, Jud, dear? If I were rich, I know I'd like to have them, and I——"

"They're yours, anyway," he interrupted, laughing. "Everything I draw is yours. You don't have to be rich."

"I mean, I'd like to have them if I was somebody else, somebody who wasn't anything to you. They'd look so nice in frames, Jud. Honestly, they would. Dear me, they're much nicer than those horrid things 'Squire Roudebush paid a dollar and a quarter apiece for."

"Nobody would want to buy my things, Justine. They're not worth the paper they cover. Now, who the dickens is there in this county that would give me a dollar for the whole lot? I couldn't give them away—that is, excepting those I've made of you. Everybody wants one of you. I guess I must draw you better than anything else."

"You make me look so much prettier than I really am," she expostulated.

"No, I don't, either," he responded. For a long time she forgot to look at his pencil. Her eyes were bent reflectively upon the brown, smooth

face with the studious wrinkle in the forehead, and she was not thinking of the picture. Suddenly she patted his cheek and afterwards toyed in silence with the curls that clustered around his ear.

An elderly lady, a slender young woman in a modish gown of gray, and a tall, boyish chap slowly approached the point from which Proctor's Falls could best be viewed. Their clothes and manner proclaimed them to be city people. The boy, over whose sullen forehead tilted a rakish traveling cap, seemed to be expostulating with the young woman. From his manner it was easy to be seen that he did not regard further progress into the wilds as pleasant, profitable, or necessary. The elder lady, who was fleshy, evidently supported the youth in his impatience, but the gray gown was enthusiastically in the foreground and was determined to push its very charming self into the heart of the sylvan discovery.

When they had come within a hundred feet of the big tree that sheltered the artist and his companion, the little bit of genre in their landscape attracted them. The visitors halted and surveyed the unconscious couple, the young lady showing curiosity, the young man showing disgust, the old lady showing indecision. Their brief discussion resolved itself into a separation of forces. The

young lady petulantly forsook her companions and picked her way through the trees toward the Falls.

"Let 'em alone, Sis," objected the youth, as she persisted in going forward; "it's some country jay and his girl and he'll not thank you for——"

"Oh, go back to the train, Randall," interrupted the young maiden. "He won't eat me, you know, and one can't see that pretty little waterfall unless one gets out there where your lovers sit. If you won't go with me, let me go alone in peace. Wait here, mamma, until I come back, and don't let little Randall sulk himself into tears."

"You make me sick," growled the youth wrathfully.

The girl in gray soon came to the edge of the little opening in which Jud and Justine sat, pausing some twenty feet away to smile admiringly upon the unsuspecting pair. It was a charming picture that lay before her, and she was loth to disturb its quiet beauty. With a sudden feeling that she might be intruding, she turned to steal away as she had come. A twig crackled under her shoe. The other girl, startled, looked up at her with amazement in her eyes, her ripe lips apart as if ready to utter an exclamation that would not come. The youth's eyes also were upon her. The intruder,

feeling painfully out of place, laughed awkwardly, her cheeks turning a brilliant pink.

"I did not mean to disturb you," she stammered. "I wanted to see the Falls and—and—well, you happened to be here."

Jud recovered himself first and, in visible agitation, arose, not forgetting to assist to her feet his wife, who in all her life had seen no such creature as this. To her the stranger was like a visitor from another world. Her own world had been Clay township. She did not dream that she was the cause of envy in the heart of the immaculate stranger, who, perhaps for the first time in her short, butterfly life, was looking upon a perfect type of rural health and loveliness.

"You don't disturb us," said Jud quickly. "I was only trying to draw the Falls and I—we don't mind. You can see very well if you will step over here by the tree."

"But you must not let me disturb you for the tiniest second. Please go on with your drawing," said the stranger, pausing irresolutely. She was waiting for an invitation from the vivid creature at Jud's side.

"He has it nearly finished," said Justine, almost unconsciously. The new arrival was charmed more than ever by the soft, timid voice.

"Won't you let me see the picture, too?" she asked eagerly. "Let me be the critic. I'll promise not to be harsh." But Jud, suddenly diffident, put the picture behind him and shook his head with an embarrassed smile.

"Oh, it's no good," he said. "I don't know anything about drawing and——"

"Let me judge as to that," persisted Gray Gown, more eager than before, now that she had found opposition. "I am sure it must be good. Your modesty is the best recommendation." She held forth her small gloved hand appealingly. Justine looked upon that hand in admiration. It was so unlike her own strong brown hand.

"It isn't quite finished," objected Jud, pleased and almost at ease. She was charmingly fair and unconventional.

"This is the first time he ever tried to get the Falls," apologized Justine, and her smile bewitched the would-be critic. She was charmed with these healthy, comely strangers, found so unexpectedly in the wilds. They were not like the rustics she had seen or read about.

"Then I'll watch him finish it," she said decisively. "Will it take a very long while?"

"Just a few more lines," said Jud. "But I can't work with any one looking on."

"Wasn't this young lady looking on?"

"Oh, but I am different," cried Justine.

"I know," said the other delightedly, "you are —are sweethearts. Of course, that does make a difference. Now, aren't you sweethearts?" The two flushed unreasonably and exchanged glances.

"I guess it's not hard to guess that," said Jud lamely. "You probably saw us before we saw you."

"Show her the picture," murmured Justine, dimly conscious that she and Jud had seemed amusing to a stranger. Jud reluctantly held up the sketching board. The stranger uttered a little cry of amazement.

"Why!" she cried, looking from the picture to the Falls up the glen, "this is clever!" Then a quizzical expression came into her eyes and she looked from one to the other with growing uncertainty. "Pardon me, I thought you were—I mean, I thought you lived near here. You must overlook my very strange behavior. But you will admit that you are dressed like country people, and you are tanned, and——" Here she checked herself in evident confusion.

"And we are country people," said Jud blankly. The young lady looked bewildered.

"Are you in earnest?" she demanded doubtingly. "Are you not out here from the city?"

"We have lived all our lives within five miles of this spot," said Jud, flushing.

"And I have never seen a big city," added Justine, first to divine the cause of the stranger's mistake. The critic thought herself to be in the presence of a genius from some city studio. It was a pretty and unfeigned compliment to Jud's picture.

"I cannot believe it," she cried. "You may live here, sir, but you have studied drawing. I have never seen a more perfect sketch."

"I have never taken an hour's instruction in my life," said Jud, his voice trembling with joy.

"Oh, now I know you have been trifling with me," she cried, flushing slightly.

"It is the truth, isn't it, Justine? I thought anybody could see that I know nothing about drawing. I only wish I could go to an art school."

"You really are in earnest?" the stranger asked, looking from one to the other. "Then you must tell me all about yourself. A man with your talent should not be lost in these wilds. You have a wonderful gift. Truly, I can hardly believe even now that you are not deceiving me."

The two glanced at each other rather helplessly, not knowing how to reply.

"You haven't looked at the Falls," stammered Jud, at last. The girl in gray laughed and her eyes went to Justine's rich, warm face as if expecting her to join in the merriment at his expense. Justine, however, was too deep in admiration to think of smiling. Caught by the gaze of the stranger, she was at last forced to smile vaguely.

"I haven't time for the Falls," said the stranger. "I am interested only in you. You are worth cultivating. Dear me, if I had you in Chicago, I'd make a lion of you. How long have you been hiding this talent out here in the woods?"

Then Jud proceeded to tell her in a disjointed, self-conscious manner how he had been drawing ever since he was a child; how his mother had assisted him; how Justine had encouraged him; how much he longed to be an artist. At the end of his brief biography, the listener abruptly asked:

"Will you sell me this picture?"

"I—I—If you'd really like to have it, I—I—will give it to you. I could not ask you anything for it. It's not worth a price. Besides, you've been so kind to me. Won't you accept it as a gift?" he answered, beginning awkwardly, but ending

eagerly. Justine's eyes were pleading with the young lady to take it.

"But you must let me pay you for it. You don't know me, nor I you; you are under no obligation to me. And I would rather pay you for it. You see, it may be your start in life."

"It's not worth anything," objected Jud.

"I know what it is worth. Fifty dollars is cheap."

Before she had finished speaking she was counting the money from her purse. Thrusting five bills into Jud's hand, she snatched up the picture and said:

"It's a bargain, isn't it? You can't take back the picture because you have accepted payment."

"Good heaven!—I mean, I can't take all of this!"

"But you can and shall," she cried delightedly. "It is not enough, I'm sure, but it is all I have with me. Some day, when you are famous, I shall have a valuable picture. Now I must be going. My mother and brother are probably in convulsions. See them? Don't they look angry? Our train had to wait three hours over at the other side of the woods until they could repair the engine. We had a breakdown."

"I wish you wouldn't force me to——" Jud began.

"Don't object, now!" she cried. "I am the gainer. Save that money to give to your sweetheart on your wedding day. That's a very pretty idea, isn't it? I know she will approve." And here she came to Justine and kissed her. "I know I should like you very much," she said honestly. Justine felt a queer sensation in her throat and her heart went out more than ever to the girl in gray.

"Remember, it is to be your wedding present when the sweet day comes."

Jud and Justine glanced sheepishly at one another, but before either had found words to tell her they were already married, she was hastening away.

"Oh, by the way," she cried, turning back, "what is your name?"

"Dudley Sherrod."

"It would be well for me to know it when you are famous. Good-bye!" she called cheerfully.

Jud hesitated an instant.

"Won't you tell me your name?" he cried. Justine clasped his arm in mute astonishment.

The receding girl turned, smiled, and held up her card, hastily withdrawn from its case. It fluttered to the grass, and she was gone.

"YOU MUST LET ME PAY YOU FOR IT."

CHAPTER VII.

LEAVING PARADISE.

JUD hurried down the slope and snatched up the piece of cardboard. His eyes sought the name, then the departing enchantress. His heart was full of thankfulness to the stranger, whose gray figure was disappearing among the oaks.

"She seems just like the fairy queen in the stories we used to read, Jud," said Justine. Looking over his shoulders, she read aloud: " 'Miss Wood.' Oh, dear; it doesn't give her first name. How I wish I knew it!"

"And it don't say where she lives," said Jud slowly.

"Chicago, I'm sure. Don't you remember what she said about wishing she had you there? Dear me, what could she do with a country boy like you in that great place? Harve Crose says there are more people there than there are in this whole county. But wasn't she nice, Jud, wasn't she nice? And did you ever see such a beautiful face?" Here Jud's sober, thoughtful eyes looked so intently upon his wife's brilliant face that she blushed under

the unspoken compliment. "And her clothes, Jud! Weren't they grand? Oh, oh, I never saw any one like her!"

The two walked slowly homeward, excitedly discussing the fair stranger and her generosity. All the evening she and the fifty dollars so unexpectedly acquired were the topics of conversation. Jud insisted upon buying a new dress for Justine—as a "wedding present"—but she demurred. The money was to go into the bank the next day, she insisted; and she ruled.

He was lying beneath a big tree in the yard, looking up at the stars, reflectively drawing a long spear of wire grass through his teeth. She sat beside him, her back against the tree, serene, proud, and happy. It was he who broke the long silence, dreamily.

"I wonder if I could make it go in Chicago."

She started from her reverie and her hand fell upon his arm. For an instant her big eyes narrowed as if trying to penetrate some shadow. In another moment they opened wide again, and she was earnestly seeking to convince him that he could succeed in the great city.

The months sped by and side by side they toiled, she with love and devotion in her soul, he with ambition added. As the winter came he slaved with

his pencil and pen, his heart bound to the new hope. The prediction at Proctor's Falls had inspired him; the glowing blue eyes had not lied to him even though the lips might have flattered. She had praised his work, and she knew! She must have known what he could do!

Justine shared the enthusiasm that had been awakened by Miss Wood. She looked upon that young woman as a goddess who had transformed her husband into a genius whose gifts were to make the world fall down in worship.

As the spring drew near Jud began to speak more often of the city and his chances for success there. He could see the pride and devotion in his wife's eyes, but he could also see a certain dim, wistful shadow in the depths. He knew she was grieving over the fear that some day he would desert their happy, simple home and rush out into the world, leaving her behind until he had won a place for her. She knew that he could not take her with him at the outset. He was to try his fortune in the strange, big city, and she was to stay in the little cottage and pray for the day to come speedily that would take her to him.

With him, ambition was tempered by love for her and the certainty that he could not leave her even to win fame and fortune. When he allowed

himself to think of her alone in the cottage, looking sadly at the stars and thinking of him in the rushing city, he said to himself: "I can't leave her!" Both knew, although neither spoke it aloud, that if he went, he would have to go alone.

Justine understood his hesitation and its cause. She knew that she was holding him back, that she alone kept him from making the plunge into the world, and her heart was sore. Night after night she lay awake in his arms, her poor heart throbbing against his ambitious heart, writhing beneath the certain knowledge that she was the weight about his neck.

One day, late in the fall, when the strain upon her heart had become too great, she broke the fetters. It was at dusk, and, coming around the corner of the cottage, she found him sitting on the doorstep, his gaze far away, his dejection showing in the droop of the broad shoulders. A little gasp of pain came from her lips—pain mingled with love and pity for him. She stood for a moment, reading his thoughts as if they were printed before her eyes—thoughts of fame, honor, success, trial, chance! How good, how handsome, how noble he was! She was the weight, the drag! The hour had come for her to decide. He would never say the word—that much she knew.

"Jud," she said, standing bravely before him. He looked up, shaking off his dream. "Don't you think it about time you were trying your luck in Chicago? You surely have worked hard enough at your drawing, and I don't see why you put it off any longer."

For a moment he was unable to speak. Into his eyes came a blur of tears.

"But, Justine, dear, how are we to live there? They say it takes a fortune," he said. There was a breath of eagerness in his voice and she detected it.

She sat beside him and laid her arm about his shoulder. He turned his face to hers, wondering, and their eyes met. For a long time neither spoke by tongue, but they understood. A sob came into his throat as he lifted her hand from her lap and drew her to him almost convulsively.

"Justine, I can't do that! I can't go away off there and leave you here alone. Why, sweetheart, I'd die without you," he cried.

"But when you are able, dear, to take me to you in the great city, we can be the happiest people in the world," she said huskily. "I'll be lonesome and you'll be lonesome, but it won't be for long. You will succeed. I know it, dear, and you must not waste another day in this wilderness——"

"It is the sweetest place in the world," he cried, passionately. "Wilderness? With you here beside me? Oh, Justine, it will be wilderness if I go away from you!"

"Surely, *surely*, Jud, it is for the best. I know you can't take me now, but you can come after me some day, and then I'll know that I have lost nothing by letting you go. You will be a great—you *will* succeed! Why, Jud, you draw better than any one I ever knew about. Your pictures even now are better than any I have ever seen. They can't help liking you in Chicago. You must go—you must, Jud!" She was talking rapidly, excitedly.

"You love me so much that you are blind, dear. Up in Chicago they have thousands of artists who are better than I am, and they are starving. Wait a minute! Suppose I should fail! Suppose they should laugh at me and I couldn't get work. What then? I have no money, no friends up there. If I don't get on, what is to become of me? Did you ever think of that?"

"Haven't you me and the little farm to come back to, Jud? I'll be here and I'll love you more than ever. And I'll die here on this old place with you beside me, and never be sorry that you couldn't do for me everything you wish," she said solemnly. Then she went on quickly: "But you won't fail—

you can't, Jud, you can't. Don't you remember what pretty Miss Wood said about your work? Well, didn't she know? Of course, she did. She *lives* in Chicago and she knows."

"If I knew where to find her or write to her, she might help me," said he, a new animation in his voice. "But there's no one I can write to. I don't know how to go about it."

"Go about it like other boys have done. Lots of them have gone out into the world and won their way. Now, Jud, when will you go?"

The moment of decision came too suddenly. He was not ready to meet it.

"I—I—oh, we can talk about this later on," he faltered.

"We must settle it now."

"Do you want me to go?" he asked after a moment.

"Yes, I do, Jud."

"How queer you are! I'd rather die than leave you, and yet you want me to go away from you," he said inconsistently.

"Don't say that! I love you better than my life! Don't you see that is why I want you to go? It is because I love you so, oh, so much, and I know it is for the best. It's not like losing you altogether. We'll be with each other soon, I know. You can

come home to see me every once in awhile, don't you see? And then, when you feel that you can do so, you will take your poor little country girl into the great city to live with you. You'll be great, then; will you be ashamed of me?"

"Ashamed of you!" he cried.

For a long time he held her in his arms in the twilight, and pleaded with her to let him remain. To her courage, to the breaking of her heart, was due the step which started him out into the world to seek his fortune and hers.

The day was set for his departure. She drew from the bank the fifty dollars his first picture had brought, and pressed it into his reluctant hands. It was she who drove him into the village. In the pocket of his Sunday clothes he carried the names of newspaper artists, so familiar to him; they were the men he was to see—the strangers who were to be his Samaritans. If they lent him a helping hand all might go well.

She was to live without him in the little paradise, with old Mrs. Crane and Caleb Spangler's boy as companions. They were to conduct the affairs of the farm through the winter months, while he fought for a footing in another universe.

It was a sobbing girl who lay all that night in the broad bed, thinking of the boy whose curly head

was missing from the pillow beside her, whose loving arms were gone, perhaps forever.

'Gene Crawley knew of Jud's intentions long before his departure. In fact, the whole township was aware of the great undertaking, and there was more or less gossip, and no end of doubt as to the wisdom of the step. It was generally conceded that Jud was a bright boy, but still "he wuzn't much to git ahead, even out in the country, so how in tarnation did he expect to make it go in the city?" A few of the evil-minded saw signs of waning love in the Sherrod cottage; others slyly winked and intimated that 'Gene Crawley had something to do with it; and the whole neighborhood solemnly shook hands with Jud and "hoped he'd come back richer'n Vanderbilt."

Crawley saw them drive away to the station in the village, and he saw the dejected young wife come slowly homeward at dusk. That night, while she rolled and sobbed in her bed, he sat on the fence across the lane from the dark cottage until long after midnight.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIRST WAS A CRIMINAL.

JUD'S first night in Chicago was sleepless, even bedless. The train rolled into the Dearborn Street station at ten o'clock and he stumbled out into the smoky, clanging train-sheds among countless strangers. It was all different from the station platform at Glenville, or even the more pretentious depot in the town that had seen his short college career. Sharp rebuffs, amused smiles, and sarcastic rejoinders met his innocent queries as he wandered aimlessly about the station, carrying his ungainly "telescope." Dismayed and resentful, he refrained from asking questions at last, and for more than an hour sat upon one of the unfriendly benches near the gates. Once he plucked up enough courage to ask a stranger when he could get a train back to Glenville.

"Never heard of Glenville," was the unfeeling response.

The crowds did not interest the new arrival; he saw the people and novelties of a great city through dim, homesick eyes, and thought only of the old, familiar, well-beloved fences, lanes, and pastures,

and Justine's sad face. His ambition waned. He realized that he did not belong in this great, unkind place; he saw that he was an object of curiosity and amusement; keenly he felt the inconsiderate stares of passers-by, and indeed he knew that his own strangeness was an excuse for the smiles which made him shrink with mortification. An old gentleman stopped at the news-stand hard by and selected a magazine. He stood beneath a dazzling arc light and turned the pages, glancing at the pictures. Jud was attracted by the honest kindliness of his face, and approached him. The old gentleman looked up.

"Excuse me, sir, but I am a stranger here, and I'd like to ask a favor," said Jud. He found that his voice was hoarse.

"I have nothing for you," said the old gentleman, returning to the magazine.

"I'm not a beggar," cried Jud, drawing back, cut to the quick.

"Don't you want enough to get a bed or something for a starving mother to eat?" sarcastically demanded the old gentleman, taking another look at the youth.

"I have had nothing but hard words since I came into this depot, and God knows I've tried to be respectful. What am I that every one should treat

me like a dog? Do I look like a beggar or a thief? I know I look just what I am, a country boy, but that oughtn't to turn people against me." Jud uttered these words in a voice trembling with pent-up anger and the tears of a long-tried indignation. Suddenly his eyes flashed and he blurted forth the real fierceness of his feelings in a savage, and, for him, unusual display of resentment: "For two cents I'd tell the whole crowd to go to hell!"

It was this intense and startling expression that convinced the stranger of Jud's genuineness. There was no mistaking the sincerity of that wrath.

"My boy, you shouldn't say that. This is a big and busy city, and you must get used to the ways of it. I see you are a good, honest lad, and I beg pardon for my unkind words. Now, tell me, what can I do for you? My train leaves in ten minutes, so we have no time to spare. Tell me what you are doing here."

Jud's heart leaped at the sound of these, the first kindly tones he had heard, and he poured forth the disjointed story of his ambitions, not once thinking that the stranger could have no personal interest in them. But he had won an attentive listener.

"You're the sort of a boy I like," exclaimed the gray-haired Chicagoan, grasping the boy's hand. "I'll be back in Chicago in three or four days, and

I'll do all I can to help you. Get along here as best you can till next Friday, and then come to see me. Here is my card," and he handed forth an engraved piece of cardboard. "Don't forget it, now, for I am interested in you. Hanged if I don't like a boy who talks as you did awhile ago. I feel that way myself sometimes. Good-bye; I must get this train. Friday morning, Mr.—Oh, what is your name?"

"Dudley Sherrod, sir, and I'm much obliged to you. But I wanted to ask a favor of you. Where can I find a place to sleep?"

"Good Lord, was that all you wanted?" And then the old gentleman directed him to a nearby hotel. "Stay there to-night, and if it's too high-priced, hunt a cheaper place to-morrow. There goes my train!"

Jud looked after him as he raced down the yard, and drew a breath of relief as he swung upon the rear platform of the last sleeper, awkwardly, but safely. Then he read the card. "Christopher Barlow," it said, "Investment Broker." It seemed promising, and with a somewhat lighter heart he made his way to his cumbersome valise, so unlike the neat boxes carried by other travelers, and prepared for the walk out into the lamplights of a Chicago street. He found the hotel, but had to occupy

a chair in the office all night, for the rooms were full. A kind-hearted clerk gave him permission to remain there until morning, observing his fatigue and his loneliness. He even checked the boy's valise for him and told him where he could "wash up."

It was Tuesday morning when he started forth for his first walk about the streets of Chicago. The clerk recommended a cheap lodging-house and he found it without much difficulty, and began to feel more at home. Some one told him how to reach the *Record* office, and he was soon asking a youth in the counting-room where he could find a certain artist. Here he encountered a peculiar rebuff. He was told that the artists did not go to work until nearly noon. To Jud, who had always gone to work at four in the morning, this was almost incomprehensible. In his ignorance, he at once began to see the easy life he might lead if ever he could obtain such a position.

All the morning he wandered about State and Clark Streets, Wabash Avenue, and the Lake Front. Everything was new and marvelous. From the lowly cot in the lane to the fifteen-story monsters in Chicago; from the meadows and cornfields to the miles of bewildering thoroughfares; from the occasional vehicle or passing farmhand of the "pike"

to the thousands of rushing men and women on the congested sidewalks; from the hayracks and the side-boarded grain-wagon to the clanging street cars and the "L" trains; from the homely garb of the yokel to the fashionable clothes of the swell. It is a striking transition when it comes suddenly.

In the afternoon he was directed to the room of the newspaper artist. He carried with him his batch of drawings, and his heart was in his shoes. Already he had begun to learn something of the haste of city life. How could he hope to win more than the passing attention of the busy man? Several girls in the counting-room giggled as he strode by, and his ears flamed red. He did not know that more than one of those girls admired his straight, strong figure and sunburnt face.

The artist was drawing at his board when Jud entered the little room facing Fifth Avenue. There was no halo of glory hovering over the rumpled head, nor was there a sign of the glorious studio his dreams had pictured. He found himself standing in the doorway of what looked like a junk-shop. Desks were strewn with drawing-boards, cardboard, pens, pads, weights, thumb-tacks, unmounted photographs, and a heterogeneous assortment of things he had never seen before. The cartoonist

barely glanced at him as he stepped inside the doorway.

"Morning," remarked the eminent man, and coolly resumed work on the drawing. Jud was stricken dumb by this indifference, expected as it was. He forgot the speech he had made up and stood hesitating, afraid to advance or retreat.

"Is this Mr. Brush?" he asked at length, after his disappointed eyes had swept the untidy den from floor to ceiling. Was this the room of a great artist? Shattered dream! The walls were covered with flaring posters, rough sketches, cheaply framed cartoons, and dozens of odd and ends, such as one sees in the junk-shops of art.

"Yes," was the brief response. "Have a chair. I'll talk to you in a minute." Jud sat in a chair near the door, his fingers spasmodically gripping the humble package of drawings he had brought all the way from the fields of Clay township to show to this surly genius whose work had been his inspiration.

"Fine day," said Mr. Brush, his head bent low over the board.

"Yes, sir," responded the visitor, who thought it one of the most dismal days in his life. After fully ten minutes of awkward silence, during which Jud found himself willing to hate the artist and that

impolite pen, the artist straightened up in his chair and for the first time surveyed his caller.

"Do you want to see me about something?"

"I want to show you some of my drawings, if you have time to look at 'em—them, sir," said Jud timidly.

"Oh, you're another beginner who wants a job, eh?" said the other, a trifle sardonically. "Let's see 'em. I can tell you in advance, however, that you'll have a devil of a time finding an opening in Chicago. Papers all full and a hundred fellows looking for places. Live here? Oh, I see—from the country." This after a swift inspection of his visitor's general make-up. "I am a little busy just now. Can you come in at six o'clock?"

"Yes, sir. I'm sorry I bothered you," said Jud, glad, in his disillusionment, to find an excuse for leaving the crowded workshop. The artist, whimsical as are all men of his profession, suddenly fell to admiring the young man's face. It was a strong type, distinctly sketchable.

"Wait a minute. I have an engagement at six, come to think of it. I'll look at 'em now," he said, still gazing. Jud reluctantly placed the package on the table and proceeded, with nervous fingers, to untie the string which Justine had so lovingly, but so stubbornly, knotted. Every expression of the

eager, embarrassed face impressed itself upon the keen eye of the watcher. It was with little or no interest, however, that Mr. Brush took up the little stock of drawings. This boy was but one of a hundred poor, aspiring fellows who had wearied him with their miserable efforts.

"Did you draw these?" he asked, after he had looked at three or four. Even Jud in all his embarrassment could see that his face had suddenly turned serious.

"Yes, sir, certainly," answered Jud.

"Didn't copy them?"

"No, sir. They are pictures of places and objects down in Glenville."

"Where is that?"

"In Indiana. You don't think they are copies, do you?"

"Drey 'em from life?" asked the other incredulously.

"Of course I did," said Jud with acerbity.

"Don't get mad, my boy. How long have you been drawing?"

"Since I was a boy—'knee high to a duck'—as we say down there."

"Ever have any instructions?"

"No, sir. I haven't been able to afford it. I

want to go to an art school when I have raised the money."

The artist looked through the pack without another word and Jud fidgeted under the strain. He was anxious to have the critic condemn his work so that he could flee and have done with it.

"Here's a pad of paper and a pencil. See how long it will take you to sketch that elevated track and the building across the street. Sit up here near the window," commanded the artist.

Jud's nerve fled as he found himself called upon to draw beneath the eye of an expert, and it was only after some little urging that he was induced to attempt the sketch. He felt uncertain, incompetent, uncomfortable, mainly because he was to draw objects entirely new to his eyes. It was not like sketching the old barns and fences down in Clay township. Closing his jaws determinedly, however, he began the task, wondering why he was doing so in the face of a decision he had reached but a moment before. He had come to the conclusion that it was not worth while to try for a place in Chicago and had made up his mind to go back to the farm, defeated. In twenty minutes he had a good accurate outline of all that met his keen gaze beyond the window-sill, and was beginning to "fill in" when the artist checked him.

"That's enough. You can do it, I see. Now I believe that you drew all these from life and nature. What's your name?"

"Dudley Sherrod."

"Well, Mr. Sherrod, I don't know you, nor do I know where Glenville is, but I will say this much to you: a man who can draw such pictures as these is entitled to consideration anywhere. It kind o' paralyzes you, eh? You may rest assured that I am sincere, because we don't praise a man's work unless it is deserving. What are you doing up here? Looking for work?"

"I want to earn enough at something to give me a start, that's all. Do you really think I'll do, Mr. Brush?" His eyes were actually snapping with excitement.

"You can be made to do. It's in you. Try your hand at newspaper illustrating and then sail in for magazine work, etching, paintings—thunder, you can do it, if you have the nerve to stick to it!"

"But how am I to get work on a paper?"

"There are twenty-five applicants ahead of you here, and we are to lose a man next month—Mr. Kirby, who goes to New York. I'll see that you get his place. In the mean time, you'll have to wait until the first of the month, and, if you like, you may hang around the office and go out with the

fellows on some of their assignments, just for practice. You won't get much of a salary to begin with, but you'll work up. I'm darn glad you came here first."

"How do you know I came here first?"

"Because you wouldn't have got away from another paper if you'd gone there. Have you any friends in the city?"

"No, sir—yes, I did meet a gentleman at the depot last night. I'm to call on him next Friday. Do you know him?" Sherrod gave him Christopher Barlow's card. The artist glanced at it, and, without a word, picked up a photograph from his desk.

"This the man?"

"Why, yes—isn't it funny you'd have it?"

"And here is his daughter." This time he displayed the picture of a beautiful girl. "And his wife, too." Jud held the three portraits in his hand, wondering how they came to be in the artist's possession. "Mrs. Barlow committed suicide this morning."

"Good heaven! You don't mean it. And has Mr. Barlow come home?"

"That's the trouble, my boy. You'll have a good deal to learn in Chicago, and you can't trust very much of anybody. You see, old man Barlow,

who has been looked upon as the soul of honor, skipped town last night with a hundred thousand dollars belonging to depositors, and he is now where the detectives can't find him."

Jud was staggered. That kindly old gentleman a thief! The first man to give him a gentle word in the great city a fleeing criminal! He felt a cold perspiration start on his forehead. What manner of world was this?

His first day in Chicago ended with the long letter he wrote to Justine, an epistle teeming with enthusiasm and joy, brimming over with descriptions and experiences, not least of which was the story of Christopher Barlow.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ENCOUNTER WITH CRAWLEY.

JUSTINE received his letter at the end of the week. The three days intervening between his departure and its arrival had seemed almost years. Since their marriage day they had not been separated for more than twelve consecutive hours. It was the first night she had spent alone—the night which followed his departure. In her brief, blissful married life it was the only night she had spent without his arm for a pillow.

The days were bleak and oppressive; she lived in a daze, almost to the point of unconsciousness. The nights brought dismal forebodings, cruel dreams, and sudden awakenings. She felt lost, in strange and unfriendly surroundings; where love, tenderness, and joy had been the reigning forces there was now only loneliness. No object seemed familiar to her. Everything that had given personality to the little farm was gone with the whistle of a locomotive, the clacking of railway coaches, the clanging of a bell. The landscape was not the same, the sky was no longer blue, the moon and stars were somber. Yank, the dog, moped about

the place, purposeless, sad-eyed, and with no ambition in his erstwhile frisky tail.

Jud had been gone more than half a day when curious neighbors pulled up their horses at the gate.

"Heerd from Jud? How's he gittin' 'long in Chickawgo?"

"I haven't heard, Mr. Martin, but I am expecting a letter soon. How long does it take mail to get here from Chicago?"

"Depends a good deal on how fer it is."

"Oh, it's over two hundred miles, I know."

"Seems to me y'oughter be hearin' 'fore long, then. Shell I ast ef they's any mail fer you down to the post-office?"

"I have sent Charlie Spangler to the toll-gate, thank you."

"Git ep!"

Mail reached the cross-roads post-office twice a day, carried over by wagon from Glenville. Little Charlie Spangler was at the toll-gate morning and evening, at least half an hour before Mr. Hardesty drove up with the slim pouch, but it was not until the third morning that he was rewarded. Then came a thick envelope on which blazed the Chicago postmark. Every hanger-on about the toll-gate unhesitatingly declared the handwriting to be that of Jud Sherrod. It was addressed to Mrs. Dudley

Sherrod. The letter was passed around for inspection before it was finally delivered to the proud boy, who ran nearly all the way to Justine's in his eagerness to learn as much as he could of its contents. Jim Hardesty had promised him a bunch of Yucatan if he brought all the news to the toll-gate before supper-time.

Justine knew the letter had come when she saw the spindle-shanked boy racing up the lane. She was awaiting the messenger at the gate.

"Is it from Jud?" she cried, hurrying to meet him, her face glowing once more. He was waving the epistle on high.

"That's what they all say," he panted, as he drew near. "Jim says he'd know Jud's writin' if he wrote in Chinese."

The poor, lonesome girl read the long letter as if it were the most thrilling novel, fascinated by every detail, enthralled by the wonderful experiences of her boy-husband in the great city. His descriptions of places, people, and customs, as they appeared to his untrained, marveling eye, were vivid, though disconnected. Then came the narration of his experience with the artist, supplemented by playful boasting, and the welcome news that he was to have employment on the great newspaper.

Justine had not, from the first, doubted his abil-

ity to find work in the city. While she glowed with pride and happiness, there was a little bitterness in her lonely heart. In that moment she realized that there had existed, unknown and unfelt, a hope that he would fail and that the failure would send him back to gladden the little home. Afterwards the bitterness gave way to rejoicing. Success to him meant success and happiness to both; his struggle was for her as well as for himself, and the end would justify the sacrifice of the beginning. It could not be for long—he had already clutched the standard of fame and she knew him to be a man who would bear it forward as long as there was life and health. She had supreme faith in his ambition—the only rival to his love.

She read certain parts of his letter aloud to Mrs. Crane and Charlie, glorying in their astonished ejaculations, widespread eyes, and excited "Ohs." Within herself she felt a certain wifely superiority, a little disdain for their surprise, a certain pity for their ignorance. With a touch of self-importance, innocently natural, she enjoyed the emotions of her companions, forgetting that she had just begun to break through the chrysalis of ignorance that still bound them.

Before "supper-time" Charlie Spangler was in possession of the Yucatan and Jim Hardesty's place

was ringing with the news of Jud's success. Long before the night was over certain well-informed and calculating individuals were prophesying that inside of five years he would be running for the presidency of the United States.

" 'Y gosh!" volunteered Mr. Hardesty, "thet boy's got it in him to be shuriff of this county, ef he'd a mind to run. 'F he stays up there in Chickawgo fer a year er two an' tends to his knittin' like a sensible feller'd oughter, he'll come back here with a reecord so derned hard to beat thet it wouldn't be a whipstitch tell he'd be the most pop'lar man in the hull county. Chickawgo puts a feller in the way of big things an' I bet three dollars Jed wouldn't have no trouble 't all gittin' the enomination fer shuriff."

"Shuriff, thunder! What'd he wanter run fer shuriff fer? Thet's no office fer a Chickawgo man. They run fer jedge or general or senator or somethin' highfalutin'. I heerd it said onct thet there has been more Presidents of the United States come from Chickawgo than from airy other State in the West. What Jed'll be doin' 'fore long will be to come out fer President or Vice-President, you mark my words, boys." Thus spake Uncle Sammy Godfrey, the sage of Clay township. He had been a

voter for sixty years and his opinion on things political was next to law.

'Gene Crawley soon heard the news. He had been awaiting the letter with almost as much impatience as had Justine. If such a creature as he could pray, it had been his prayer that Justine's husband might find constant employment in Chicago. The torture of knowing that she was another man's wife could be assuaged if he were not compelled to see the happiness they found in being constantly together. He could have shouted for joy when he heard that Jud was to live in Chicago and that she was to remain on the farm, near him, for a time, at least.

"Well, Jed's gone, 'Gene," said Mrs. Hardesty, meaningly, as he leaned over the greasy counter that evening. "'Spose you don't keer much, do you?"

"Don't give a damn, one way or t'other," responded he, darkly, puffing away at his pipe. Despite his apparent calmness, his teeth were almost biting the cane pipe-stem in two. "Has he got a job?"

"He's goin' to draw picters fer a newspaper up there, an' they do say the pay's immense."

"How much is he to git?"

"He says in his letter he's to start out with $15 a week, an'll soon be gittin' twict as much."

"You mean a *month.*"

"No; a week, 'Gene. Thet's what the letter said."

"Aw, what you givin' us! Him to git $15 a week? Why, goldern it, I'm only gittin' $18 a month, an' I've allus been counted a better hand'n him. Who said that was in the letter?" Jealousy was getting the better of 'Gene.

"Charlie Spangler heerd Justine Van read it right out loud, an' he's a powerful quick-witted boy. He gen'rally hears things right."

"He's the cussedest little liar in Clay township," snarled 'Gene.

"You know better'n that, 'Gene Crawley. You're jest mad 'cause Jed's doin' well, thet's what you air, and you know it," cried she.

"Mad? What fer?" exclaimed he, trying to recover his temper for the first time in his life.

"'Cause you're jealous an' 'cause he's got her, thet's what fer," she said, conscious that she was stirring his violent nature to the boiling point. But to her surprise—and to his own, for that matter—he gulped and laughed coarsely.

"Well, he's welcome to her, ain't he?" he asked. "Who's got a better right?"

"Thet ain't the way you talked a year ago," she said meaningly.

"You know too dern much," he said and walked away, leaving behind a thoroughly dissatisfied woman. But Mrs. Hardesty did not know how deeply she had cut nor how he raged inwardly as he hurried homeward through the night.

Several days later he boldly climbed the meadow fence, and, for the first time since the fight, started across Justine's property on a short cut to the hills. What his object was in going to the hills in the dusk of that evening he himself did not clearly understand, but at the bottom of it all was the desire to intrude upon forbidden ground. Beneath the ugliness of his motive, however, there lurked a certain timidity. He was conscious that he was trespassing, and he knew she would not like it. But if she saw him cross the meadow, he never knew. His intention had been, of course, to attract her notice, and he was filled with disappointment. Late in the night he walked back from the hills. There was a light in one of her rear windows, and he peered eagerly from the garden fence, hoping to catch a glimpse of her. When Yank began to bark, he threw stones at the faithful brute and stood his ground, trusting that she would come to the door. He cursed when old Mrs. Crane appeared in the yard,

calling in frightened tones to the dog. Then he slunk away in the night. The next day and the next he strode through the meadow. With each failure he grew uglier and more set in his purpose, for he had a fair certainty that she saw and avoided him.

One evening he ventured across the meadow, his black eyes searching for her. Suddenly he came upon her. She was driving a cow home from a far corner of the pasture, leisurely, in the waning daylight, her thoughts of Jud and the future. She did not see Crawley until he was almost beside her, and she could not restrain the gasp of terror. Hoping that he would not speak to her, she hurried on.

"Have you heerd from Jud ag'in, Justine?" he asked, his voice trembling in spite of himself.

"How dare you speak to me?" she cried, not checking her speed, nor glancing toward him.

"Well, I guess I've got a voice an' they ain't no law ag'in me usin' it, is there? What's the use bein' so unfriendly, anyhow? I'll drive the cow in fer you, Justine," he went on with a strange bashfulness.

His stride toward her brought her to a standstill, her eyes flashing with resentment.

" 'Gene Crawley, you've been ordered to keep off of our place and I want you to stay off. If you ever

put your foot in this pasture again I'll sic' Yank on you. Don't you ever dare speak to me again." She drew her form to its full height and looked into his face.

"If you sic' Yank on me I'll kill him, jes' as I could 'a' killed *him* when we fit over yander by the crick. I let him up fer your sake an' I've been sorry fer it ever sence. Say, Justine, I want to be your friend——"

"Friend!" she exclaimed scornfully. "You're a treacherous dog and you don't deserve to have a friend on earth. If you were a man you'd keep off this place and quit bothering me. You know that Jud's away and you are coward enough to take the advantage. I want you to *go*—go at once!"

"You ain't got no right to call me a coward," he growled.

"Do you think it brave to say what you did about me and to make your boasts down at the toll-gate? Is that the way a man acts?"

"Somebody's been lyin' to you——" he began confusedly.

"No! You did say it and there's no use lying to me. I loathe you worse than a snake, and I wouldn't trust you as far. 'Gene Crawley, I've got a loaded shotgun in the house. So help me God, I'll kill you if you don't keep away from me."

She was in deadly earnest and he knew it. The rage of despair burned away every vestige of the brutal confidence in which he had intruded upon her little domain.

"I'm not such a bad feller, Justine——" he began, with a mixture of defiance and humbleness in his voice. It was now dark and they were alone, but she commanded the situation despite her quaking heart.

"You lie, 'Gene Crawley!" she exclaimed. "You are a drunken brute, and you don't deserve to be spoken to by any woman. You are not fit to talk to—to—to the hogs!"

He clenched his fists and an oath sprang to his lips. "I've a notion to——" he hissed, but could not complete the threat. The suppressed words were "brain you."

"I expect you to," she cried. "Why don't you do it, you coward?" He glared at her for a moment, baffled. Suddenly his eyes fell, his shoulders trembled, and his voice broke.

"I wouldn't hurt you for the whole world, Justine." He turned and walked away from her without another word.

'Gene Crawley never touched liquor after that night. "Not fit to talk to the hogs," "a drunken brute," were sentences that curdled in his heart,

freezing forever the lust of liquor. He was beginning to crave the respect of a woman. Deep in his soul lay the hope that if he could only cease drinking he might win more than respect from her.

CHAPTER X.

THE CLOTHES AND THE MAN.

IT was six weeks before Jud had saved enough money to make the rather expensive trip to Glenville. In that time he found many experiences, novel and soul-trying. The busy city clashed against the rough edges of this unsophisticated youth and quickly wore them off. By the time he was ready to board the train for a two-days' stay with Justine he had acquired what it had taken other men years to learn. Keen and quick-witted, he easily fell into the ways of strangers, putting forward as good a foot as any country-bred boy who ever went to Chicago.

The newspaper on which he was employed recognized his worth, and at the end of the month he was pleased beyond all expression to find a twenty dollar gold piece in his envelope instead of a ten and a five. The chief artist told him his salary would improve correspondingly with his work. Still, he realized that twenty dollars a week was but little more than it required to keep him "going" in this spendthrift metropolis. The men he met were good fellows and they spent money

with the freedom customary among newspaper workers. Jud did not spend his foolishly, yet he found he could save but little. He did not touch liquor; the other boys in the office did. His friend, the chief artist, advised him to save what money he could, but to avoid as much as possible the danger of being called a "cheap skate." He was told to be anything but stingy.

The young artist would gladly have eaten at lunch counters and slept in the lowliest of flats if he could have followed his own inclinations. But how could he let the other boys spend money on expensive meals without responding as liberally? It was with joy, then, that he welcomed the increase; and besides, it proved to him that there was promise of greater advancement, and that at no far distant day he could bring Justine to the city.

He took a bright twenty dollar gold piece to her on that first and long-expected visit. She met him at the station. All the way out to the little cottage he beamed with the pleasure and pride of possessing such love as came to him from this glowing girl. He forgot to compare her with the visions of loveliness he had become accustomed to seeing in the city. So overjoyed was he that he did not notice her simple garments, her sunburnt hands, her brown face. To him she was the most beautiful of

all beings—the most perfect, the most to be desired.

"Jud, dear, I am so happy I could die," she whispered as they entered the cottage door after the drive home. He took her in his arms and held her for neither knew how long.

"Are you so glad to see me, sweetheart?" he asked tenderly.

"Glad! If you had not come to-day I should have gone to Chicago to-night. I could not have waited another day. Oh, it is so good to have you here; it is so good to be in your arms! You don't know how I have longed for you, Jud;—you don't know how lonely I have been all these years."

"Years! It has been but a month and a half," he said, smiling.

"But each day has been a year. Have they not seemed long to you?" she cried, chilled by the fear that they had been mere days to him when they had been such ages to her.

"My nights were years, Justine. My days were short; it was in the nights that I had time to think, and then I felt I should go wild with homesickness. You will never know how often I was tempted to get up out of bed and come back to you. It can't be long, it must not, till I can have you up there with me. I can't go through many such months as the last one; I'd die, Justine, honest I would."

"It won't be long, I know. You are getting on so nicely and you'll be able soon to take me with you. Maybe this winter?" She asked the question eagerly, dubiously.

"This winter? Good heavens, if I can't have you up there this winter, what's the use of trying to do anything? I want you right away, but I know I can't do it for a month or two——"

"Don't hope too strongly, dear. You must not count on it. I don't believe you can do it so soon—no, not for six months," she said, again the loving adviser.

"You don't know me," he cried. "I can do it!"

"I hope you can, Jud, but—but, I am afraid ——"

"Afraid? Don't you believe in me?"

"Don't say that, please. I am afraid you won't be ready to have me up there as a—a——"

"A what, sweetheart?"

"A very heavy burden."

"Burden! Justine, you will lift the greatest burden I will have to carry—my spirits. I need you, and I'll have you if I starve myself."

"When you are ready, Jud, I'll go with you. You can tell when the time comes. I'll starve with you, if needs be."

That night they received callers in the fire-lit

front room. The whole community knew that he was at home, and everybody came to sate legitimate curiosity. Some talked, others joked, a few stared; until at length the township was satisfied and hurried home to bed. For days the people talked of the change they had observed in Jud—not so much in respect to his clothes as to his advanced ideas. "Aleck" Cranby was authority for the statement that Sherrod was engaged in "drawin' picters fer a dictionary. Thet's how he knows so all-fired much."

The young artist's brief stay at home was the most blissful period in his life and in hers. They were separated only for moments. When the time came for him to go away he went with a cheerier heart and he left a happier one behind. In their last kiss there was the promise that he would return in a month, and there was, back of all, the conviction that she would go with him to Chicago within six months. On the train, however, he allowed gloomy thoughts to drive away the optimism that contact with Justine had inspired. He realized that every dollar he possessed in the world was in his pocket, and he had just six dollars and thirty cents. At such a rate, how much could he accumulate in six short months?

Back on the little farm there was a level-headed

thinker who was counting on a year instead of six months, and who was racking her brains for means with which to help him in the struggle. One good crop would be a godsend.

For several weeks Jud observed the strictest economy. When next he went to the farm for a visit it was with sixty dollars. Most of this he gave to Justine, who hid it in a bureau drawer. Winter was on in full blast now, and he did not forget to purchase a warm coat for her, besides heavy dress-goods, underwear, and many little necessities. Thanksgiving saw her dressed in better clothes than she had known since those almost forgotten days of affluence before the mining swindle. Jud, himself, was not too warmly clad. He refused to buy clothes for himself until he had supplied Justine with all she needed. His suit was old but neat, his shoes were new, his hat was passable, but his overcoat was pitiful in its old age.

The night after his return from the farm, he had a few good friends in his room to eat the apples, cakes, and nuts which his wife had given him at home. It was a novel feast for the Chicago boys. Ned Draper, a dramatic critic, had money in the new suit of clothes which graced his person, and he sent out for wine, beer and cigars. The

crowd made merry until two o'clock, but not one drop of liquor passed Jud's lips.

"Sherrod, where did you get that overcoat I saw you wearing to-day?" asked Draper, in friendly banter. Jud flushed, but answered steadily: "In Glenville."

"The glorious metropolis of Clay township—the city of our youth," laughed Hennessy, the police reporter.

"You ought to pension it and give it a pair of crutches," went on Draper. "It has seen service enough and it's certainly infirm. I'll swear, I don't see how it manages to hang alone."

"It's the best I can afford," cried the owner, resentfully.

"Aw, what are you givin' us? You're getting twenty a week and you're to have thirty by Christmas—if you're good, you know,—and I would blow myself for some clothes. Hang it, old man, I mean it for your own good. People will think more of you if you spruce up and make a showing. Those clothes of yours don't fit and they're worn out. You don't know what a difference it will make in your game if you make a flash with yourself. It gets people thinking you're a peach, when you may be a regular stiff. Go blow yourself for some clothes, and the next time you chase down to Glen-

ville to see that girl she'll break her neck to marry you before you can get out of town. On the level, now, old man, I'm giving it to you straight. Tog up a bit. It doesn't cost a mint and it does help. I'll leave it to the crowd."

"The crowd" supported Draper, and Jud could but see the wisdom in their advice, although his pride rebelled against their method of giving it. The sight of the other men in the office dressing well, if not expensively, while he remained as ever the wearer of the rankest "hand-me-downs," had not been pleasing. For weeks he had been tempted to purchase a cheap suit of clothes at one of the big department stores, but the thought of economy prevented.

"You haven't any special expense," said Colton, the third guest. "Nobody depends on your salary but yourself, so why don't you cut loose? Your parents are dead, just as mine are, and you are as free as air. I can put you next to one of the best tailors in Chicago and he'll fix you out to look like a dream without skinning you to death."

Jud smiled grimly when Colton said that no one but himself depended on his salary. These fellows did not know he was married. An unaccountable fear that they might ridicule him if he posed as a married man who could not support his wife had

caused him to keep silent concerning his domestic affairs. Besides, he had heard these and other men speak of certain wives, often in the presence of their husbands, in a manner which shocked him. No one had asked him if he were married and he did not volunteer the information. It amused him hugely when his new acquaintances teased him about "his girl down in old Clay." Some day he would surprise them by introducing them to Justine, calmly, in a matter-of-fact way, and then he would laugh at their incredulity.

"I can't afford clothes like you fellows wear," he said in response to Colton's offer.

"Of course, you can—just as well as I can," said Colton.

"Or any one of us," added Draper. "Clothes won't break anybody."

"You're a good-looking chap, Sherrod, and if you dressed up a bit you'd crack every girl's heart in Chicago. 'Gad, I can see the splinters flying now," cried Hennessy, admiringly.

"It's no joke," added Colton. "I could tog you out till you'd——"

"But I haven't the money, consarn it," cried the victim, a country boy all over again. They laughed at his verdancy, and it all ended by Colton agreeing to vouch for him at the tailor's, securing for

him the privilege of paying so much a month until the account was settled.

Jud lay awake nights trying to decide the matter. He knew that he needed the clothes and that it was time to cast aside the shabby curiosities from Glenville. He saw that he was to become an object of ridicule if he persisted in wearing them. Pride demanded good clothes, that he might not be ashamed to be seen with well-dressed men; something else told him that he should save every penny for a day that was to come as soon as he could bring it about. At last he went to Colton and asked him what he thought the clothes would cost, first convincing himself that tailor-made garments were the only kind to be considered.

Colton hurried him off to the tailor, and within an hour he was on the street again, dazed and aware that he had made a debt of one hundred and thirty dollars. He was to have two suits of clothes, business and dress, and an overcoat. For a week he was miserable, and a dozen times he was tempted to run in and countermand the order. How could he ever pay it? What would Justine think? At length the garments were completed and he found them at his hall door. Attached was a statement for $130, with the information that he was to pay $10 a month, "a very gracious conces-

sion as a favor to our esteemed friend, Mr. Colton," said the accompanying note. In a fever of excitement he tried them on. The fit was perfect; he looked like other men. Still, his heart was heavy. That night, taking up his old cast-off suit, he mourned over the greasy things that he and Justine had selected at Dave Green's store the week before they were married. They were his wedding clothes.

"I'll keep them forever," he half sobbed, and he hung them away carefully. The time came for his next visit to the little farm. In his letters he had said nothing about the new clothes, but he had admitted that unexpected expenses had come upon him. He could not bring himself to tell her of that extravagance. He believed that she would have approved, but he shrank from the confession.

When he boarded the train for the trip home, he was dressed in the clothes he had first worn to Chicago, the greasy wedding garments. He never forgot how guilty he felt when she told him the next evening, as they sat before the old fireplace, that he should buy a new overcoat and a heavy suit of clothes. And after he went away on Monday she wondered why he had been so quiet and preoccupied during his visit.

CHAPTER XI.

WHEN THE WIND BLOWS.

FOR weeks he hated the new clothes, handsome though they were, and yet he realized the difference they made at the office, where tolerance was turning to respect. He could but appreciate the impression he now made in places where he had had no standing whatever up to the time when he had donned the guilty garments.

Not a day passed during his residence in the city that did not find him on the look-out for a certain graceful figure and glorious face. He never gave up the hope of some day meeting the vivacious Miss Wood. When first he had come to Chicago there had been no doubt in his mind that he would presently see her in the street, but that hope had been dissipated in a very short time. He did not fear that he would fail to recognize her, but he ceased to believe that she would remember in him the simple boy of Proctor's Falls. He was also conscious of the fact that she could be friendly with the country lad, but might not so much as give greeting to the new Jud Sherrod. In one of his

conversations with the chief artist he innocently asked if he knew Miss Wood. The artist said that he did not, but that as there were probably a million and a half of people in the city who were strangers to him, he did not consider it odd. Jud looked in a directory. He found 283 persons whose surname was Wood. Not knowing his friend's Christian name, he was unable to select her from the list.

He did not know that the names of unmarried girls living with their parents were not to be found in the directory. In the society columns of the newspapers he frequently saw a name that struck his fancy, and he decided that if it did not belong to her she had been imperfectly christened. He began to think of her as Celeste Wood. A Celeste Wood lived in the fashionable part of the north side, and he had not been there a month before he found the house and had gazed in awe upon its splendor—from a distance. Several times he passed the place, but in no instance did his eye behold the girl of Proctor's Falls.

He told Justine of his search for the beautiful stranger, and she was as much interested as he. She, too, came to call her Celeste and to inquire as to his progress in every letter. They exchanged

merry notes in which the mysterious Celeste was the chief topic.

Christmas came and he spent it with Justine. It was a white Christmas and a glad one for everyone except Jud. He cursed the cowardice that forced him to sneak down to Glenville in that tattered suit of clothes, for he still shrank from the confession of what seemed extravagance and vanity. In spite of all he could do to prevent it, the cost of living in the city increased and he could save but little. Paying for those hated garments was a hard task each month; it seemed to take the very ten dollars he had intended to save. The clothes he wore home were now bordering on the disreputable, and at Christmas time he vowed he would wear them no more. Justine had said that she hated to accept the present he brought when she saw how much he needed clothing.

Not once did he swerve in his fidelity to her. He was the only man in Chicago, it seemed to him, who refused to drink liquor. He dined with the fellows, accompanied them on various rounds of pleasure, but he never broke the promise he made to Justine: to drink no liquor. The gay crowd into which he was tossed—artists, writers and good fellows—introduced him here and there, to nice people, to gay people and to questionable people. In the cafés he

met wine-tippling ladies who smiled on him; in the theatre he met gaily dressed women who smiled on him; in the street he met stylish creatures who smiled on him. He met the wives and sisters of his friends, and was simple, gentle, and gallant; he met the actresses and the gay ones of the midnight hour and was the same; he met the capricious, alluring women of the fashionable world, and was still the abashed, clean-hearted lover of one good girl. She was the only woman. Three objects he had to strive for: to succeed in his work, to make a home for Justine, and to find Celeste. One sin harassed him—the purchase of two suits of clothes and an overcoat.

Winter struggled on and matters grew worse with Justine. She did not tell Jud of the privations on the farm; to him she turned a cheerful face. Nothing depressive that might happen down there on the over-tilled little farm should come to him; he should be handicapped in no way by the worries which beset her. The fall crop had been poor throughout the entire state. There had been little wheat in the summer, and the corn-huskers of September found but half a crop. The farm was run on half rations after the holidays, simply because the granary was none too full. She had sold but little grain, being obliged to retain most of it for

feeding purposes. What little money Jud sent to her soon disappeared, despite her frugality. She and old Mrs. Crane lived alone in the cottage, and together they fought the wolf from the kitchen door and from the barnyard. How Justine wished that she might again teach the little school down the lane! She had given it up that fall because the time could not be spared from the farm.

She cared for the horses, cows and pigs—few in number, but pigs after all—while Mrs. Crane looked after the chickens. That winter was the coldest the country had known in thirty years, according to Uncle Sammy Godfrey, who said he had "kep' tab on the therometer fer fifty-three year, an' danged ef he didn't b'lieve this'n wuz the coldest spell in all that time, 'nless it wuz that snap in sixty-two. That wuz the year it fruz the crick so solid 'at it didn't thaw out tell 'long 'bout the Fourth of July."

January was bitter cold. There were blizzards and snowstorms, and people, as well as stock, suffered intensely. Horses were frozen to death and whole flocks of sheep perished. Justine, young, strong and humane, worked night and day to keep her small lot of stock comfortable. The barn, the cowshed and the hogpens were protected in every way possible from the blasts, and often she came

to the house, half-frozen, her hands numb, her face stinging. But that bravery never knew a faltering moment. She faced the storms, the frosts and the dangers with the hardihood of a man, and she did a man's work.

With an ax she chopped wood in the grove back of the pasture until the heavy snows came. She would not ask neighbors to help her; indeed, she refused several kindly offers. There was not a man in the neighborhood who would not have gladly found time to perform some of her more difficult tasks.

One morning, cold almost beyond endurance, she awoke to find that in some mysterious manner a large pile of chopped wood lay in her dooryard. How it came there she did not know, nor would she use it until she found by the sled tracks in the snow that it had been hauled from her own piece of timber land. Again, in the night time, someone rebuilt a section of fence that had been torn down by the wind. She was grateful to the good neighbors, but there was a feeling of resentment growing out of the knowledge that people were pitying her. So when Harve Crose drove up one afternoon with a load of pumpkins for the stock, she declined to accept them. But she could not sit up of nights, tired and cold as she was, to drive away those who

stole in surreptitiously and befriended her. She could not so much as thank these indefatigable friends.

Her heart and courage sank to the bottom one morning when she arose to learn that during the night the wind had blown the straw-thatched roof from her cowshed and the two poor beasts were well-nigh dead from exposure. She sat down and cried, nor could Mrs. Crane comfort her. To replace that roof was a task to try the strength and endurance of the hardiest man; for her it seemed beyond accomplishment.

Nevertheless, she set about it as soon as the cows were transferred to the crowded barn. The roof, intact, lay alongside the pen, the straw scattered to the winds. There was but one way to replace the timbers, and that was to take them apart and reconstruct the roof, piece by piece. She had battered several rough-hewn supports from their position and was surveying the task before her with a sullen expression in her eyes. The vigorous exercise had put a hot glow in her cheeks, and, as she stood there in the snow, her ax across her shoulder, as straight as an arrow, she was a charming picture. A biting atmosphere chilled the breath as it came from her red, full lips, wafting it away, white and frosty.

The man who vaulted the fence behind her and

came slowly across the barn lot felt his heart beat fiercely against the rough oilskin jacket. The girl did not see him until she turned at the sound of his hoarse voice.

"That ain't no work fer you," he was saying.

She found herself looking into the hostile eyes of 'Gene Crawley. There was real anger in the man's face; he looked contemptuously at the girl's slim figure, then at the wrecked house, then slowly down at his big, mittened hands. Justine gasped and moved back a step.

"I ain't agoin' to hurt you, Missus Sherrod," he said, quickly. "I'm goin' to help you, that's all."

"I do not require your assistance," she said, coldly. "Why do you come here, 'Gene, when you know I despise to look at you? Why do you persist in annoying me? Is it because my husband isn't here to protect me?"

"We won't argy about that ag'in," he answered, slowly. "You cain't put that roof on the shed an' I kin, so that's why I'm here. I was jes' goin' past when I seen you out here slashin' away with that ax. Thinks I, I'll not 'low her to do that nasty job, an' so I jes' clumb over the fence an'—an'—well, ef helpin' you out of a hard job is annoyin' you, Justine, you'll have to put up with it, that's all; I'm goin' to put that roof on, whether you

want me to er not. You're damn—I'm sorry I said that—but you're mighty near froze. Go in by the fire an' I'll 'tend to this."

"I insist that you are not to touch a hand to this lumber. I cannot pay you for the work and I will not accept——"

"Don't say a word about pay. You k'n have me arrested ef you want to fer trespass, er you k'n go in an' git that shotgun of your'n an' blaze away at me, but I'm not goin' to let you kill yourself workin' out here on a job like this."

He drew off his oil jacket and threw it back in the snow. The ax dropped from her shoulder and was buried in the white drift. Without a word he strode to her side and fished the implement from the snow.

"I'd rather die than to have you do this for me, 'Gene Crawley," she hissed. "What do you think I'd be if I let you do it? What will the neighbors say if I let you lift a hand to help me? What ——"

He interrupted with a smothered oath.

"They dassent say anything, dang 'em," he grated. "This is my business, an' ef they stick their noses in it they'll git 'em pounded to hell an' gone."

"Couldn't you have said all that without swear-

ing?" she exclaimed, scornfully. His face actually burned with shame and his bold eyes wavered.

"I didn't mean to, Justine. I—I jes' fergot. I want to tell you I don't cuss like I used to. Only when I git right mad. 'Sides, ef you'd gone in the house when I told you to, you wouldn't 'a' heerd."

"Are you going to get off of my place?" she suddenly demanded.

"Not tell I've fixed this roof," he replied doggedly.

"I don't want it fixed," she said.

"What's the use sayin' that? You was trying to do it yourself when I come up here. Will you go in the house er will you stand out here an' freeze?"

"Do you think you're doing me a favor in this? Do you think I will thank you after it is done?"

"I don't believe I expect to be thanked, an' I'm only doin' it because you hadn't ought to. I'd do it fer any woman."

He swung the ax against the restraining timbers and a dozen strokes freed the roof from its twisted fastenings. She stood off at one side and glared at him. She forgot everything except that her enemy—Jud's bitterest foe—was deliberately befriending her. A sudden thought came to her, and

the sharp exclamation that fell from her lips caused him to pause and glance at her.

"Ain't you goin' in by the fire?" he demanded, panting from the exertion.

"'Gene Crawley, do you know who has been cutting wood up in the grove and bringing it to my door?" she demanded.

"Yes," he answered, looking away.

"You?"

"Yes."

"If I had known that, I'd have frozen to death before I used a stick," she cried, the tears rushing to her eyes.

"An' I fixed your fences an'—an'—an', I might as well tell you, I come around ever' night to see that your stock is all right," he went on.

"You! oh, if I had only known! You! You!" she exclaimed, glaring at him with such fury and hatred that his eyes dropped and a miserable laugh of humiliation struggled through his teeth. As if to ward off the fierce, direct stabs of those bitter eyes, he fell to wielding the ax with all his strength. The chips flew and far away through the crisp air rang the song of the steel. He did not look up until the roof lay detached and there was no more chopping to be done. His face was still

burning hotly. It was the first real goodness of heart he had ever shown, and it had met repulse.

The anger melted when he saw her. She had not moved from the spot, but it was another creature altogether who stood there now. Justine's hands were pressed to her eyes and she was crying. Her whole body trembled and her thinly clad shoulders heaved convulsively.

Big 'Gene Crawley was helpless before this exhibition of feeling. He felt that he was to blame for her grief, and yet a longing to comfort her came over him. She looked forlorn, wretched, cold. He would have liked to pick up the shivering girl and carry her to the house. He tried to speak to her, but there was nothing to say. The fear that she would resent a friendly word from him checked the impulse.

Unable to control his own feelings and possessed of a wild desire to act in some way, he threw down the ax and performed one of those feats of prodigious strength for which he was noted. Stooping, he lifted the edge of the heavy roof until he could work his broad shoulders under the end. Then, with an effort, he slowly shifted his load to the side of the low shed. Rapidly he went about the little structure and replaced timbers that had been wrenched away, not once turning his face

toward her. When all was in readiness for the final effort, he grasped the side of the roof that still touched the ground and prepared for the lift. The cords stood out in his neck, the veins were bursting in his temples, but steadily his heavy shoulders rose and with them the whole weight of the timbers. His great back and powerful legs pushed forward and the roof moved slowly back to its place.

Then he collapsed against the side of the shed. She had witnessed this frightful display of strength with marveling eyes. Once she was on the point of crying out to him to stop, certain that no human power could endure such a strain. When the task was done she gave way to unaccountable tears and fled to the house, leaving him leaning against his support, fagged and trembling.

After a few moments his strength returned and he began to fill up the open places under the edge of the roof. At the end of an hour the shed was as good as new. Then, with a long look toward the unfriendly house in which she dwelt, he turned and started for the road, defeated but satisfied that he had been of service to her. At the sound of her voice he stopped near the fence. She had come from the house and was following him.

" 'Gene, I can only thank you for what you have done. I did not want you to do it, but—but I

know I couldn't have managed it myself," she said, hoarsely.

"O, it wasn't much," he growled, looking away.

" 'Gene, you must not come here again and you must not do these things for me. I don't want you to help me. I know what you said about me down at the toll-gate that night, and I know what people will say if you come here. Won't you please stay away, 'Gene?"

He looked steadily into her eyes for the first time and there was a touch of real nobility in his face as he said slowly and with difficulty:

"I thought, maybe, Justine, ef I kinder slaved aroun' fer you they might see that I am good an' honest, an' that I didn't mean what I said that night. I wisht somebody'd cut my tongue out afore I said them things, er I wisht I'd been Doc Ramsey an' got knocked down fer standin' up fer you. I cain't see you workin' aroun' like this when I ain't got a thing to do, an' I—I—well, I jes' thought people'd see I was sorry fer what I said."

"But they'll say the very worst they can about it," she cried, piteously.

"Then I'll kill somebody!" he grated, and, clearing the fence, was off down the road.

CHAPTER XII.

THE GOOD OF EVIL.

WHEN Justine wrote her next letter to Jud she purposely neglected to describe the encounter with 'Gene. For the first time she wilfully deceived him. In her letter she spoke lightly of the wind's work and casually mentioned the unimportant fact that one of the neighbors had generously helped her to make the repairs. She felt that Jud's hatred for Crawley would have inspired something rash in him. She was confident that he would throw aside his work, his chances,—everything,—and rush to her protection. And so she found consolation in deception.

It was her duty—to God and to herself—to keep these men apart, to prevent the addition of fuel to the flame which smoldered silently, stealthily. There was no doubt in her mind that 'Gene was truly penitent. She could not trust him, for she despised him too deeply, but she felt for him a new spirit of fairness. He had served her and he had served like the whipped, beaten dog who loves the hand of a cruel master. For days after the episode

at the cowshed she did not see him, and she was glad.

Every morning, however, she looked forth, fearful that she might see him at work or behold some result of his labor in the night. One morning she found a brace of rabbits and a wild turkey at her door. Mrs. Crane saw them, too, and she was so full of joy that the girl could not find heart to cast 'Gene Crawley's offering away. And she herself was hungry. While Mrs. Crane fried the rabbits, the girl sat back of the stove, out of patience with herself, yet scarcely able to resist the fragrant aroma that arose from the crackling skillet. Pride and hunger were struggling and hunger won.

Jud came and went once more. She wore her best frocks and was cheeriness itself when he was with her. He brought her a few trifles, and she loved him as much as if he had given her jewels, and indeed what pleased her most was the change in his looks. He wore his tailor-made suit. She did not know that he was still in debt to his tailor, and he did not tell her.

On the day of Jud's departure she met 'Gene in the village. Her husband had made her happy with the renewed promise that she could come to him in the spring. Justine's heart was singing, her lips were burning with the warmth of his love.

Bundled in shawls and blankets, she drove slowly from the village through the first vicious attacks of a blizzard. Her thoughts were of the handsome, well-dressed youth in the warm railway coach. She forgot the cold, blustery weather and saw only the bright garden of paradise which his love had created. Her heart sang with the memory of the past two days and nights spent with him.

Just as her old gray horse fumbled his way into the open lane at the edge of town, she saw a man plodding against the wind, not far ahead along the roadside. It was 'Gene and he was starting out upon a long walk to Martin Grimes's place. With a blow or two of the "gad," she urged the horse past him. The single glance she gave him showed his face red with the cold and his head bent against the wind. As she passed he looked up and spoke.

"Howdy, Justine."

"Good evening, 'Gene," she replied, but she could hardly hear her own voice.

"It's a nasty drive you got ahead of you," he called.

"O, I'll soon be home," she responded, and he was left behind.

For half a mile there rang in her ears the accusing words: "It's a nasty drive you got ahead of you." What of the walk ahead of him? Now

that she had grown calm she wondered how she could have passed him without asking him to ride home. He had been kind to her, after all; he had redeemed himself to some extent in the past few weeks and—he had not asked her for the ride as she had feared he would. She recalled his cheery greeting and his half-frozen face and then his anxiety concerning the discomfort ahead of her. By no sign did he show a desire to annoy her with his company. She looked back over the road. In the twilight, far behind, she saw him trudging along, a lonely figure against the sky.

"It's a shame to make him walk all the way home. He'll freeze, and I can just as well take him in as not," she said to herself, and pulled the horse to a standstill, resolved to wait for him. Then came the fear that some one might see him riding home with her. The country would wonder and would gossip. Unsophisticated country girl as she was, she knew and abhorred gossip. Once a good girl's name is coupled with that of a man in the country, the whole community shuns her; she is lost. In the country they never forget and they never investigate. Turning her face resolutely she whipped up, leaving him far behind.

While she was stabling her horse, by the light of a lantern, she found herself, amidst warm

thoughts of Jud, reproaching herself for the unkindness to this man who hated her husband and who had sworn to be her undoing. She might have given him the ride, she argued against herself; it was so little to give and he was so cold. The blizzard was blowing in force by this time, and her conscience smote her fiercely as she thought of him forging along against its blasting chill. In the village Jud had purchased several suits of warm underclothes for her and she had placed the package in the seat beside her. Groceries and other necessaries were beneath the seat. To her dismay and grief, she found that the package had been in some manner jolted from the seat and was doubtless lost on the road, miles back.

The next morning saw the storm still raging. The night just past had been one of the most cruel the country had ever known. Her first thought was of her stock, then of 'Gene Crawley. Had he reached home safely or had he been frozen out there on the open road? A chill of fear and remorse seized her and she turned sick at heart. Jud would not have allowed the man to face such a storm, and if he were frozen no one would condemn her cruelty more bitterly than tender-hearted Jud.

She ran to the rear door of her house, from which Grimes's home on the hill could be seen, a

mile away. The gust of wind drove the door open as she turned the knob. Something rolled against her feet. The lost bundle lay before her, left there in the night by—it could have been no other than 'Gene Crawley. It was a sob of honest thankfulness to the poor wretch she had spurned in the highway that came from her lips as she lifted the package and closed the door. For many minutes she stood by the window, clasping the bundle in her arms, looking out into the bleak morning. A feeling of relief surged up in the multitude of thoughts, and tears stood in her eyes. Not only had he braved the blizzard safely, hardily, but he had traveled a mile or more farther through the freezing night to deliver at her door the package she had lost from the seat that might have been shared with him.

"Did ye hear 'bout 'Gene Crawley?" asked Mrs. Crane, later, when Justine came in from the barn. The old woman was preparing the frugal breakfast and Justine was seated beside the stove, her half-frozen feet near the oven. A sickening terror forced a groan from her lips, for something told her that the news was the worst. His body had been found!

"What—what is it?" she whispered.

"He whupped the daylights out'n Jake Smalley

an' Laz Dunbar down to the tollgate day 'fore yest'day. Mrs. Brown wuz here las' night jest 'fore you got home, an' she says her man says 'twuz the wust fight that ever wuz fit in the county."

Justine was leaning back in her chair, her heart throbbing with relief.

"Was—was he hurt?" she asked, indefinitely.

"Who? 'Gene? Not a speck! But that big Smalley wuz unsensibul when 'Gene got off'n him. Doc Pollister says he won't be able to see out'n them eyes o' his'n fer over a week. Laz lit out an' run like a whitehead after 'Gene hit him onct. I'm glad he didn't git hurt much, 'cause he's goin' to be babtised down at the crick tomorrer, an' he'd 'a' tuck cold, shore. I tell you, that 'Gene Crawley's a nasty feller. Constable O'Brien's afeered to serve the warrant on him."

"What was it all about, Aunt Sue?"

"O, nothin' much," answered Mrs. Crane, evasively, suddenly busying herself about the stove. "I never did see sitch a fire! It jest won't act right. Where'd this wood come from, Jestine?"

"From the jack-oak grove," said Justine. For a while she was silent, a new impression forming itself in her brain. Stronger and stronger it grew until it became almost a conviction. "Tell me

what the fight was about," she went on, breaking in upon Mrs. Crane's chatter.

"O, I'd ruther—er—I don't know fer shore what it wuz about. Somethin' Jake said to 'Gene, I reckon. 'Gene fights 'thout any real cause, y' know." The old woman was clearly embarrassed and eager to evade the explanation.

"You do know and you must tell me," exclaimed Justine, now fully convinced.

" 'Twon't do you no special good, Jestine, an' I wouldn't mind about it, 'f I wuz you."

"Tell me: was it—did it have anything to do with me?"

"Didn't amount to nothin'—not a thing," expostulated the other. "You know how these fool fellers will talk."

" Did 'Gene Crawley say anything mean about me?" she insisted.

"No. 'Twuz jest the other way—er—I mean ——"

"Heavens! What did they say? Tell me! What could they say?"

"I hadn't orter tell you, but I guess it's best you know. Seems like Jake an' Laz met 'Gene down to the tollgate an' wuz a wonderin' how you wuz gittin' along this cold spell. Jake, who's a low down feller ef they ever wuz one, give 'Gene the

wink an' says—now, this is how Mrs. Brown tells it—he says: 'Jud don't git home much, does he?' 'Gene said he didn't know an' he didn't give a damn—'scuse me, but them's the words. 'Nen Laz says: 'Now's yer time to cut in, 'Gene. Do what you said you would. You cain't have a better chanst.' 'Nen Jake laughed an' said: 'She's all alone up yander an' I reckon she's purty dern lonesome. Now's yer oppertunity, 'Gene,——' Jest then, Mrs. Brown says her man says, the fight begin. 'Fore Jake could finish up sayin' what he started out to say, 'Gene lit into him right an' left. Down went Jake an' Laz follered him. Jake wuz up fust, an' while he wuz tryin' to keep 'Gene off, Laz broke fer the door an' got away. But the way 'Gene did whup that Smalley feller wuz a caution. Mr. Brown says you could 'a' heerd him beller clean down to the mill."

"Is that all?" asked Justine, breathlessly.

"Wuzn't that almost enough? O, yes; 'Gene tole Jake an' everybody else there 'at ef ever a word wuz said about you ag'in, in any shape er form that wuzn't jest right, he'd lick the tarnation soul out'n the hull capoodle, men an' women. He said he meant women when he said women, an' ef he ever heerd of one of them talkin' about you er repeatin'

what he said there at the tollgate on your weddin' night, he'd jest lay her over his knee an'——"

"Were there many people at the tollgate when the fight took place?" interrupted Justine. She was glowing with excitement.

"The place wuz full, an' Mr. Brown says he never did see sitch a scatterment as they wuz when 'Gene sailed into Jake. Jim Hardesty tried to git under the stove, an' Uncle Sammy Godfrey, old as he is, jumped clean over the counter an' upsot a half barrel of sugar. Ever'body run, an' nobody tried to help Jake, 'cept Doc Ramsey's mother, an' that's 'cause he goes with Liz Ramsey. They do tell that that's sure to be a match," and then the voluble Mrs. Crane branched off into other lanes of gossip.

The next Sunday a whole township saw Eugene Crawley walk into the little Presbyterian church on the hill and nervously take a seat near the stove. Mr. Marks, the minister, was reading the first hymn when 'Gene plunged into this strange place, and so great was the sensation that the reader, having stared blankly with the remainder of the witnesses, resumed reading on the opposite page and no one was the wiser. At first there was a certain fear in the hearts of all that he had come for no other purpose than to report the death of

some loved one. No one dreamed that he had come to attend divine worship.

'Gene, himself, was astonished by his own temerity. It had taken all his courage to do it, and he was an humble man as he sat stiffly by the stove and looked at the upper left-hand corner of the organ. If the minister had uttered his name suddenly, 'Gene would have swooned. It was the first time he had been inside the church since a certain Christmas eve, twenty years before. When Deacon Asbury asked him, after service, if he intended to come regularly, now that he had begun, 'Gene's reserve vanished, and, transfixing the old gentleman with a glare, he roared:

"What is it to you, you old skinflint? You don't own the shebang, do you? I'll come ef I want to an' you needn't meddle about it either."

In consequence, the whole community said that his conversion was out of the question, and that all the pulpits in Indiana could not pull him out of the rut into which he had fallen. 'Gene, in truth, felt that he was not wanted in the church, and he went home with the conviction that the deacon's inquiry was inspired by the hope that such a sinner as he might not continue to blight the sanctuary with his presence.

A day or so later the word was carried to the

tollgate by Charlie Spangler that Justine Sherrod was "sick-a-bed" and it "looked as though she was liable to have lung fever." Dr. Pollister called at her house and found her really ill. He took her in hand at once, and instructed Mrs. Crane to see that she remained in bed until he said she could get up.

"But who is to take care of the stock?" wailed the sick girl.

"Mrs. Crane and I will see to the stock, so don't you worry, Justine. You've got to stay in bed or Jud'll be coming to a funeral purty soon," observed the doctor, with the best of intentions, but with little tact. She gasped at the thought that she might die and leave Jud; her illness had been but a trifling matter to her until the grim old physician so plainly told her the truth. She realized that she was in danger and that she wanted Jud to sit by the bedside.

"Is it so serious, doctor?" she asked, anxiously.

"Not if you stay in bed. Only a bad cold and some fever, but it has to be looked after. You've got good lungs or you'd be a good deal wuss."

Then he went out and told Mrs. Crane to look after her, and said that he'd ask some one to drop around every day to care for the horses, cows and hogs, and to chop some wood occasionally.

As he drove toward the village in his rattling old buggy, he met 'Gene Crawley in the road.

"Whoa!" he said to the horse; and that evening 'Gene Crawley was living up to a promise to "look out fer Justine's stock and to git up some wood whenever she needed it."

When Mrs. Crane told Justine that he was to come three times a day while she was sick, to "look after things," the tired, feverish girl shook her head and sighed, but offered no protest against the unwelcome fate.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FINDING OF CELESTE.

JUD received several letters from her, telling him that she was ill, but getting better, and that the neighbors were very kind to her. He replied that he would come home if she needed him, but she insisted that it was not necessary. She penned that letter, sitting up in bed. She wanted him, she hungered for him, she suffered in longing for one touch of his hand.

By this time Sherrod had formed many acquaintances and had at last been persuaded to join an artists' club. The cost was not much, and he found great pleasure in the meetings. His salary had been increased, but his expenses grew correspondingly. Try as he would, he could find no way to curtail the cost of living. Sometimes he looked back and wondered how he had existed during the first few months in the city. Once he tried the plan of living as humbly as he had at first, but it was an utter impossibility. The worst feature was that he could send Justine but little money, nor could he see his way clear for bringing her to the city. He was bitter against himself. He loved her; no other

woman tempted him from that devotion. But there seemed to be no way of making a home for her in Chicago. The honest fellow did not perceive the fact that selfishness was the weight which drew his intentions out of balance.

His companions liked him all the more because he was unswerving in his resolve to touch no liquor. He went with them to bars and wine rooms, but he never touched wines, nor did other vices tempt him. Up in his room at the lodging house hung a picture he had drawn after reading the story of a man's downfall. He called it "Wine, Women, Woe."

He had now allowed his friends to believe him unmarried so long that it was next to impossible to explain. They alluded frequently to the sweetheart down in the country, and he smiled as if to say: "I don't mind being teased about her." He made no one his confidant and no one asked questions. The boys took it for granted that some day he would marry "the girl down there," and said nothing. He laughed when he thought of the surprise in store for them some day. This thought usually took him back to the day at Proctor's Falls when Celeste had spoken of him and Justine as sweethearts and had given him fifty dollars with which to buy her a wedding present. The name and face of the donor had haunted him ever since that day. Her

card was in his pocketbook. Somewhere in this great city she lived and, he was beginning to know, left other cards in the halls of her friends every day—ordinary cards; not like this that had made a man's career. But there seemed to be no chance to tell her the difference. He had not seen her.

One of the fellows at the club was Converse, a rich young man with a liking for art and the will to cultivate a rather mediocre talent. He took a fancy to the handsome young newspaper man, and invited him to his home on the South Side. One evening late in March he dined with Converse and his parents. Douglass Converse was an only child and was little more than a boy in years. The home in Michigan Avenue was beautiful and its occupants lived luxuriously. The dinner over, the two young men lounged in Converse's "den"—a room which astonished and delighted Jud—smoking and chatting idly.

"Funny you don't drink, Sherrod," said Converse, quizzically.

"I took a pledge once, and I expect to keep it."

"Always?"

"Always."

"Pledge to your mother, I suppose?"

"No; to a girl who—lives down there."

"Oho, that's the first bit of sentiment I ever heard from you. A sweetheart, eh?"

"Well, I can't deny it," said Jud, ashamed of his equivocation.

"Tell me about her," cried his friend, enthusiastically.

"There's nothing to tell. I had a letter from her to-day."

"Then it's still on?"

"I hope so," answered Jud, smiling mysteriously.

"You're devilishly uncommunicative. If I had a sweetheart who could make me live up to a promise like that, I'd be only too glad to sing her praises to the sky."

"Fall in love with some good, true girl, old fellow, and see how much you'll tell the world about it," said Jud, cleverly dodging the point.

"I am in love and with the best girl in the world, but what good does it do me? She's not in love with me. Confound the luck, I'm younger than she is," cried Converse, ruefully. Sherrod laughed and puffed dreamily at his cigar for a few moments.

"It's a crime to be young, I presume," he said, as if obliged to reopen the conversation. Converse was standing at his desk, looking at a photograph.

"Don't give up because you are young. You'll outgrow it. I was very young when—when—I

mean, I was younger than you by several years when I first fell in love," went on Jud, confusedly.

"But, I have no chance, you know," said the other, boyishly.

"Prefers another?"

"Don't know; I haven't had the courage to ask. She thinks I'm a nice boy and such good company. Girls don't say those things about the fellow they care for seriously. I'd rather be anything than a nice boy."

"Is that her photograph?"

"Yes. Isn't she a dream?"

The owner of the den passed the portrait to his guest. Converse was surprised to see him start violently and then pass his hand over his eyes as if brushing away some form of doubt.

"This is—this is Miss Wood?" asked Sherrod at last.

"Do you know her? If you do, you can't wonder that I'm hard hit," cried the other.

"I met her once down near my old home. One doesn't forget a face like hers. So I find her, after all, and the sweetheart of my best friend," Jud was saying, hazily.

"Oh, no! Don't put it that way. She'd fall dead if any one suddenly intimated that such a re-

lationship existed—keel over with surprise. But have you never seen her more than once?"

"Just once. She bought the first picture I ever sold."

"Great Cæsar! Are you the fellow who drew a picture of a waterfall somewhere and sold it to her for fifty dollars?" Converse was staring at Jud with eager eyes.

"I'm the one who imposed upon her," said Jud, lamely.

"Then, you're the good-looking country boy with the beautiful sweetheart that Celeste talked so much about. Well, this beats the——"

"Celeste? Is that her name?" cried Jud, sitting bolt upright.

"Yes. Her mother is French—she was a countess, by the way. Celeste has that picture hanging in her den—and her den is a wonder, too—and she never fails to tell about that little experience down in Indiana. She'll be crazy to meet you."

Jud's heart gave a leap. He was bewildered in a tumult of emotions. The recognition of the portrait, the mysterious coincidence in names—the one his imagination had given her, and the one she bore; the thoughts that she remembered him and Justine; that his picture hung in her den; that she

might really be glad to see him. Impossibilities upon impossibilities!

"My picture in her den?" he managed to stammer, feeling sure that his friend could detect an emotion that might require explanation.

"Sure—most prominent thing in the room. She says the boy who drew it will be a master some day. The trouble is, she forgot your name. She says she'd know your face or the girl's anywhere, but the name is gone. By George, this will please her."

The girl's! Jud's thoughts flew back to Justine, tenderly, even resentfully, for why should this careless city maid speak of her as "the girl"?

"I'll take you to call, Sherrod. I know she'll be glad to see you, and I'll surprise her. This is great! Let's see: I'll say you are a particular friend, but I'll not give up your name. She'd remember it. I can see her now when she first gazes upon your face. Great!"

Jud went home that night in a delightful torture of anticipation. After all these months of waiting and watching, fate—nothing less than fate—was to bring him to her side with the long unspoken words of gratitude and joy. What would she be like? How would she look? How would she be dressed? Not in that familiar gray of his memory, to be sure, but—but—and so he wondered, as he tossed in his

bed that night. It would be some days before Converse could take him to the home of Miss Wood, and until then he must be content with imaginings. One thing worried him. Just before he left his friend, Douglass had asked with an unhidden concern in his voice:

"You're sure you've got a sweetheart down there?"

Jud's heart stopped beating for a second. Something within him urged him to cry out that he had no sweetheart, but a loving, loyal wife. But the old spirit of timidity conquered.

"I am sure I had one," he replied, and his heart throbbed with relief.

"And you're the kind of a fellow who'll stick to her, too. I know you well enough to say that," said the other warmly, as if some odd misgiving had passed from his mind.

"Thanks for the good opinion," said Jud, a great lump clogging his throat.

And when at last he slept, his dreams were of the old days and Justine, and how lonely he was without her—how lonely she must be down there in the cold, dark night—sick, perhaps, and longing for him. In his dream they were at Proctor's Falls, then in Chicago, then she was beside him in the bed. His arm, moved by dream love, stretched out and

drew her close to his breast and there were no scores of miles between his tranquil heart and that of the girl he worshiped.

CHAPTER XIV.

"MY TRUEST COMRADE."

HE LOOKED forward to the meeting with Miss Wood as if it were to be one of the epochs in his life. An odd fear took possession of him—cowardice, inspired by the knowledge that he was not of her world. Once again he felt like the crude, ignorant country boy, and he trembled at the thought of meeting this beautiful "society girl" in her own realm. In the old days he had interested her as if he were a curiosity; now he was to see her on different grounds. He was to submit to an inspection which he knew he was not yet able to endure. As the night drew near for the visit to her home, as arranged by the glowing Converse, self-consciousness overpowered him. What would she think of him?

Converse rushed in one day and told him that he had just seen Miss Wood on the street—in fact had ridden several blocks in her carriage—and that a strange coincidence was to be related. She was driving to the Art Institute with his drawing of Proctor's Falls. She had, through some influence of her own, obtained permission to hang it for a

few weeks. No sooner had his visitor departed than Jud, throwing aside his work, dashed from the building and off to the Institute. He hoped that he might see her there; at least, he might again look upon that humble sketch as it hung among the aristocratic lordlings of art. She was not there, but he managed to find his picture. A man was placing it in a rather conspicuous place on the wall.

"New picture, eh?" Jud asked, assuming indifference.

"Yes. It beats the devil how the management lets cranks, just because they're pretty, come in here and hang chromos. Look at that. Wouldn't that jar you? Lead pencil and crayon, and as cheap as mud. Next thing we know they'll be hanging patent medicine ads in here."

Jud walked away. He never forgot that half minute of impersonal criticism. As he was hurrying from the building he saw a carriage drive swiftly from the curb below. For one brief instant he had a glimpse of a face inside—one that he had never forgotten.

She drove toward State Street, in the direction of the big stores to the north. Hoping for another glimpse of her, he followed. From afar he saw her enter her carriage and whirl away toward the river and her North Side home. Then he went back

to work and to the letter he was writing to Justine. It teemed with references to the fairy of Proctor's Falls.

The next evening but one found him ready for the call, but very nervous. He felt that he was taking a step into the world in which he might not be fit to hold a place; a world which would stare curiously at him as a gifted plebeian, and shut its doors upon him when the novelty had died.

He dressed himself laboriously for the event. It was to be his introduction into select society, and he must not let that be the occasion for the faintest twinkle of mirth in the eyes of those to the manner born. At the Athletic Club he met Converse, who looked him over admiringly. If Converse had purposed exhibiting him to Miss Wood as a matter of entertainment for one night, the plan was not feasible. Instead of the careless artist or the unsophisticated youth, there appeared a straight, strong figure, a clean-cut face, keen and handsome. Indeed, Converse found himself envying Jud's dignity of manner. He did not know that the apathy of the person who rode beside him was the composure of extreme dread. Almost before Jud was aware of it, he was inside the Wood drawing-room, awaiting the appearance of its mistress. Through the maze he could barely remem-

ber passing an august personage who opened the doors to them and who said that Miss Wood was expecting Mr. Converse. Then he found himself sitting in a gorgeous apartment, blankly listening to the undertones of his friend, and responding with mechanical calmness, so that Converse marveled again at his conventional bearing. That young man was delighted with the surprise he had in store for the girl he loved.

She came into the room suddenly and unexpectedly, and the two men arose—one with a laugh, the other with serious, questioning eyes. Miss Wood gave Converse her hand and turned to Jud with the smile which precedes an introduction. He detected the instantaneous gleam of inquiry, strengthened presently to perplexity and wonder.

"Let me present——" began Converse, but she restrained him quickly. There was now an intentness in her gaze that brought the blood to Jud's face.

"I know your face—don't speak, Douglass. Will you let me guess—let me think? Pardon my extraordinary behavior, but I am so sure I know you. I have seen you often, very often, I know. You are—oh, dear, how embarrassing! Yes, yes, I know now!" Her eyes fairly danced with the joy of discovery and she impulsively came to him

with hand outstretched. "You are the artist—the boy who drew the picture!"

"Yes, you have guessed," said Jud.

"I knew your face. I am so glad to see you. And you are living out my prophecy, too. Where is the country boy now? What did I tell you?" She stood before him, her eyes looking squarely up into his face, bright with smiles.

"I am trying to merit the recommendation you gave me, but I am afraid I'll fail," said he.

"Fail?" cried Converse. "You've made a sensational hit, Sherrod, and you owe it to this prophet in petticoats. She made you. If it hadn't been for her, you'd be down there in the woods plowing hay and digging cucumbers and nobody'd know you were on earth. If I were you I'd jump up and crack my heels together, and yell like a cannibal. That's how happy I'd feel."

The boy's excitement was contagious, and Jud began to lose some of his embarrassment.

"I am happy, and I'd like to shout my gratification to Miss Wood," he said. "She fairly drove me to some sort of action. Without her encouragement I'm sure nothing could have induced me to try my luck here."

"Oh, you would have discovered yourself some day. Genius like yours would sooner or later have

become a master and compelled you to obey. I merely poked you until you awoke from the dreams and began to see things as they are. And are you really living in Chicago?"

Then she compelled him to tell her all about himself, his work, and his plans. She was so deeply interested that his heart glowed. As he sat and talked with her, forgetting that Converse was present, he felt himself gradually lulled into security, like that of a traveler who has crept along the edge of a precipice for miles and has reached a haven from which he can look back and laugh at the terrors.

For an hour they conversed, seriously, merrily about his experiences in the city. He was a true gentleman, therefore modest; the pronoun "I" was used as sparingly as possible, and there was an absence of egotism that charmed his new-found friend. He was beginning to realize the success he had achieved in the city, but one look into his honest gray eyes proved that he was no braggadocio. She saw that she could safely compliment him on his progress; she compared him as he sat before her with the country boy she had first known, when she told him that she knew then that he was a great diamond that needed little polishing. The magnificence of his surroundings, the beauty of his

hostess, the subtle influence of splendor, softened his first rough feelings of apprehension into the mellow confidence of ease and urbanity. It was all so strange and sweet that he lived it over and over again in the days that followed, before he could convince himself that he—poor Jud Sherrod—had not really been in fairyland.

There was no questioning the sincerity of her admiration. Converse sat back and jealously watched the light in her eyes, and listened to the new fervor in her voice as she talked to the man whose demeanor plainly indicated that he considered her his guiding star in the journey from obscurity to light.

"O, yes," she cried, suddenly, a taunting gleam coming to her eyes, "I have forgotten something quite important. What has become of the beautiful sweetheart? I never saw a prettier girl. Is she still down there?"

For a moment the spell was broken. He caught his breath. He had forgotten Justine—his own Justine! His composure fled, his eyes wavered before the laughing eyes of his inquisitor. His lips parted with the impulse to blurt out that she was his wife, when he remembered Converse. He had led Converse with the others to consider him unmarried, unintentionally and innocently he knew

down in his heart. His helpless looks from one to the other showed such unmistakable signs of embarrassment that Miss Wood hastily sought to relieve the situation, fearing she had committed a painful blunder.

"I beg your pardon. It is not my affair and I——" she began, but Converse, obtuse and rejoicing in Jud's discomfiture, interrupted.

"O, she's still there, all right, all right. Look at his blushes! I wish I had the luck he has."

"Douglass Converse, I'll send you to the library if you don't keep quiet. I hope you will pardon my natural curiosity, Mr. Sherrod," she said, gravely.

Sherrod caught his breath again and battled for an instant with something in his throat, then allowed a deeper flush to follow the first—the flush that comes with criminal bravery.

"I don't mind telling you about her. She still lives down at my old home and often writes to me about you, wondering whether I have seen you," he said in a hard voice, fully resolved to deceive for the time being.

"Don't forget to let me know what she says when you tell her you have really seen me. I am so interested in her. What is her name?"

Without a moment's hesitation he took the plunge.

"Justine Van."

"What an odd name. Yet she was an odd looking girl. Her beauty was so different, so fresh, so pure. I hope the gay life of the city is not turning you away from that jewel down there. O, I know what the city does for young men who come from the country. It usually spoils them. They forget the best, the truest part of their lives, and they let new faces drive out the old and loving ones."

"I—I don't think you quite understand the situation," floundered Jud, moved to contrition. Had she not interrupted at that instant, he would have told the truth.

"It is easier to understand than you think," she said. "You are up here, she is there. You are a new man with new ideas, new possibilities, new hopes; she is the same sweet, innocent country girl, no farther advanced than she was the day you left her. You have gone forward, she stands still. You are Dudley Sherrod, the most promising of young artists, with popularity ready to leap at you; she is the common lass of the fields, honest and true, unknown except to the people who live nearby. You are up here, thrown with bright men, and perhaps

with clever women, while she is back there with the farmers and the farmers' wives. You have every opportunity to be somebody; she will always be nobody unless she is lifted from that mire of inactivity. Don't you see how well I understand the situation? You have every advantage, she has none. Yes, Mr. Sherrod, you are living out the promise I made for you months ago, and you are winning only what is yours by right. But you must not forget that there are few such jewels here as the one you left behind when you sought treasures in the world."

"That's the neatest lecture I ever heard, Celeste," cried Converse, admiringly. "You musn't forget to go back and polish up the jewel, Sherrod. That's what she means, in few words."

Jud feared that both were laughing at him and resented it.

"I am sure Miss Wood has said nothing that is untrue concerning Justine Van. She is the noblest girl I ever knew," he said, deliberately. "She is far above me in every way. She has more reason to stoop to me than I to her. She is my best friend."

"Friend?" echoed Miss Wood.

"My truest comrade," said he. The perspiration started on his forehead.

CHAPTER XV.

ONE HEART FOR TWO.

THE passing of two months saw Sherrod a constant, even a privileged, visitor at the Wood home. In that time he visited the cottage in Indiana but once, and on that occasion glowingly related to Justine the story of his first visit to the goddess and of her subsequent interest in his affairs.

Just now he was beginning to realize the consequences of his deception. Affairs had reached the stage where it seemed next to impossible to acknowledge his marriage to Justine, and he certainly could not tell that honest, trusting wife of his unfortunate duplicity. He loved her too deeply to inflict the wound that such a confession would make, and yet he could see that delay would only increase the violence of the shock should she learn of his mistake, innocently conceived, but unwisely fostered.

Justine also had a secret. When he was ready to take her to the city, she would confess to him that 'Gene Crawley was to farm the place for her that spring and summer, working on the shares.

He was to use his own team, for her horses had died of influenza. So little did Jud know of the old home place now that he did not recognize Crawley's horses in the stable, nor could he see that a man's hand had performed wonders in the field. He was thinking of Chicago and the miserable broil in which his affairs were involved. Justine induced Crawley to remain away from the farm during Jud's stay, an undertaking which required some force of persuasion. Crawley wanted to make peace with Jud and to assure him of his good faith; he begged her to let him apologize to his old adversary and ask him to shake hands and say quits. But she knew that Jud would not understand and that there could be no forgiveness. Never in her life had she loved Jud as in these days when she was disobeying and deceiving him. While she knew that 'Gene was no longer the brute and the blackguard of old, she saw that her husband could look upon him only as he had known him.

The farm was bound to do well this year and she was happy to give Jud that assurance. Once he caught her looking wistfully at him when he was telling of expected triumphs in the city. He knew that she was hoping he would say that she could soon go with him to the city, leaving the farm to

care for itself. But how could he take her there now? He groaned with the shame of it.

A week of sleepless nights followed this visit to Clay township. The young artist's work on the paper suffered and his fellows advised him to take a rest. He had had no vacation since taking the position many months before. But it was not overwork that told on him; it was the lying awake of nights striving to find a way out of his predicament without losing the respect of all these friends, especially that of one whom he admired so deeply. He had permitted her to believe him free and had behaved as a free man behaves to such an extent that explanations were impossible. To tell her the truth concerning the man she had gone to the theatre with, had lunched with in downtown restaurants, had entertained in her own home almost to the exclusion of others, could bring but one end—the scorn and detestation he deserved.

Poor Converse had given up the conflict in despair, but, good fellow that he was, held no grudge against Sherrod, for whom he had genuine admiration. They were lunching together a week or two after his trying trip to Clay township, and Jud was so moody that Converse took note of it. As they sat at the table, Converse mentally observed that his friend was growing handsomer every day;

the moods improved him. After a long silence, the artist said:

"I had an offer to-day to do some book illustrating for a publishing house."

"Good! That's the stuff! Book pictures will be your line, old man. Will you accept?"

"I'm afraid I'd be a failure," said Jud, gloomily.

"Is that what's the matter with you?"

"What do you mean?" demanded the other, quickly.

"O, your grumpiness. You've been all out of sorts for a couple of weeks, you know—or maybe you don't. But you have, anyway. I never saw a fellow change as you have in—in, well, ten days."

"I don't understand why you think so. Everything is all right with me," said Jud, shortly.

"Maybe you're off your feed a bit."

"Never was better in my life."

"Well, it's darned queer. You act like a man whose liver is turning mongrel. Why, you ought to be satisfied. You've made a big hit here and you'll soon be getting the biggest salary of any newspaper artist in town. You have been elected to the Athletic Club, you have been invited to lecture before some of the clubs, you've got plenty of coin to throw at birds, so why don't you rub those wrinkles from between your eyes?"

Jud laughed rather mirthlessly, without taking his eyes from the coffee which he was stirring.

"Wrinkles don't come because you want them, but because you don't."

"Well, old chap, I'm sure something is worrying you. Can I help you in any way?" went on his generous friend.

"Thanks, Doug; you can help me to another lump of sugar."

"The devil take you," cried Converse, handing him the bowl. "Say," he said, a moment later, watching Jud as he calmly buttered his bread, "I believe there's a woman in it."

"A woman!" exclaimed the other, almost dropping his knife. For an instant his gray eyes seemed to look through the other's brain. "What are you driving at, Doug?" he went on, controlling himself.

"I'm next to you at last, old man. You're in a deuce of a boat. You're in love."

"And if I were, I can't see why I should have to hire a boat."

"It's all right to talk that way, but you are in the boat, just the same. Maybe it's a raft, though, and maybe you're shipwrecked. You are one of these unlucky dogs who find out that they love the second girl after having promised to marry the first

one. The size of it is, you've about forgotten the little Indiana girl you were telling me about." For a whole minute Jud stared at him, white to the lips.

"You have no right to talk like that, Converse," he said, hoarsely.

"I beg pardon, Jud; I didn't mean to offend. Honestly now, I was talking to hear myself talk," cried the other.

"I have not promised to marry any one in Indiana," said Jud, slowly, cruelly, deliberately.

"Then, you are free as air?" asked Converse, a chill in his heart.

"Or as foul," said Sherrod.

"Sherrod, is this girl down in the country in love with you?"

"You mean the one I spoke of?" asked Jud, his head swimming.

"Yes, the one you spoke of."

"My dear fellow, the girl I spoke of has been married for three years. I am very sure she loves her husband."

"Thank God for that, Jud. I was afraid you were forgetting her, just as Celeste said you might. It wouldn't be right to break her heart, you know."

"Excellent advice," said Jud.

"Have you seen Celeste since Sunday? I saw you together at St. James'."

Sherrod had already dropped four lumps into his coffee and was now adding another.

"I saw her last night. Why?"

"'Gad, you're pretty regular, aren't you?" said Converse, bitter in spite of himself.

"It strikes me you are talking rather queerly."

"I presume I am. You'll forgive me, though, when I remind you that I care a great deal for her. It rather hurts to have her forget me entirely," said the poor fellow.

"Come, come, old man, you're losing your nerve," cried Jud, his eye brightening. "I'm sure you can win if you'll only have heart."

"Win! You know better than that. If you don't know it, I'll tell you something. She's desperately in love with another man at this very minute."

"What?" ejaculated Jud. "Miss Wood in love with—with—another man? Why—why—I've not seen her pay any especial attention to any one."

"You must be blind, then. There's only one man in the world she cares to see any more, or cares to have near her."

"Good heavens, no! I never suspected—by George, Doug, surely you're dreaming!" He

could not understand a certain jealousy that came to him.

"Can't you see that she's in love with you—*you?*" cried the boy.

The two looked at each other intently for a moment, despair in the eyes of one, incredulous joy in those of the other. Sherrod could feel the blood rushing swifter and swifter to his heart, to his throat, to his face, to his eyes. Something red and hot floated across his vision, turning the whole world a ruddy hue; something strong and light seemed striving to lift his whole being in the air.

"Well, why don't you say you don't believe it?" said a voice in front of him.

"I—I can't say a word. You paralyze me. My heavens, Converse, I never dreamed of such a thing and I know you're mistaken. Why, it cannot be—it shouldn't be," he almost gasped.

"Bah! What's the use? Women don't ask permission to fall in love, do they? They just fall, that's all. I'm not saying it is absolutely true, but I'm making a pretty fine guess. She is more interested in you than in any man she has ever known. I know that much."

"Interested, perhaps, yes, but that is not love. Hang it, Douglass, she cares for you."

"No, she doesn't, Jud; no, she doesn't. No such

luck. I don't appeal to her at all and I never can. I step down and out; you've a clear field so far as I am concerned. If I can't have her, I'd rather see her go to you than to any one in the world. You're good and honest and a man."

"Impossible! Impossible! It can't be that. You don't understand the real situation——" floundered Jud.

"I understand it as well as you do, my boy,—better, I think. I know Celeste Wood and that's all there is to it. You've won something that a hundred men have fought for and lost. You're a lucky dog."

Jud Sherrod went to his rooms that night, after a dizzy evening at the theatre and the club, his head whirling with the intoxication coming from a mixture of rejoicing, regret, shame, apprehension, incredulity,—a hundred irrepressible thoughts. What if Converse's supposition should be true? Then, what a beast he had been! This night he slept not a wink—in fact, he did not go to bed. He even thought of suicide as he paced the floor or buried his face in the cushions on his couch.

With it all before him there suddenly came uppermost the thought of his base treatment of Justine. Here he was earning a handsome salary,

living comfortably and cozily, spending his money in the entertainment of another woman, leading that other woman on to what now seemed certain unhappiness, and all the time neglecting the trusting, loving wife even to the point of cruelty. Down there in the bleak, uncouth country she was struggling on, loving him, trusting him, believing in him, and he was keeping himself afar off, looking on with selfish, indifferent eyes. All this grew worse and worse as he realized that of all women he loved none but Justine—loved and revered her deeper and deeper with every hour and day.

As the dawn came, in the eagerness of repentance, he seized pen and paper and wrote two letters, one to Justine, one to Celeste. To Justine he poured forth his confession and urged her to save him, to live with him, to go with him to another city where he could begin anew. To Celeste he admitted his shameful behavior, pleaded for forgiveness, and asked her to forget that he had ever come into her sweet, pure life. But he never sent the letters.

His courage failed him. With the temporizing weakness of the guilty, he destroyed the bits of honesty his heart had inspired, and planned anew, feverishly, sincerely, almost buoyantly. He would see Celeste personally the next day or night, tell

her all and face her scorn as best he could. He would see her once more—once more—and then,—Justine forever!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FALL OF THE WEAK.

HE HAD the firmest intention to lay bare before Miss Wood the miserable facts, without the faintest hope for pardon. He knew this frank, pure girl so well by this time that her reception of the humiliating truth was as plain as day to him. The esteem in which she had held him would vanish with the first recovery from the shock his words would bring; all the honors he had won through her instrumentality would turn to the most despised of memories; all that she had done for him would be regretted; the dear companionship, the cheer, the encouragement, all would go.

He had not intended a wrong in the beginning. In his wretched brain there was the persistent cry: "You did not think! You did not know what you were doing! There was no desire to gain by this deception. You did not intend to be dishonest!"

It had begun with the sly desire to surprise the "boys" some happy day when he could show to them the wife who was his pride. Almost unconsciously he had gone deeper into the mire of

circumstances from which he could not now flounder except with sullied honor. Without a thought as to the seriousness of the situation, he had allowed this innocent friend to compromise herself by an almost constant association with him. He had intended telling her the secret when first he met her, exacting a promise to keep it from Converse for a little while, at least. She was to be his confidante, his and Justine's, for he meant to tell her that the brave little woman of Proctor's Falls cherished her as ideal, unknown but loved.

Celeste had unconsciously baffled all these good intentions, building a wall about the truth so strong that it could not break through. It went on, this sweet comradeship, until he—a married man—was looked upon by outsiders as the man to whom this unattainable girl had given her love. Converse's blunt assertion had given him the first inkling of the consequences the intimacy had engendered. Worse than all else, he now realized how dear Celeste Wood had become to him. On one hand, Justine was his ideal; on the other hand, Celeste was an ideal. It seemed to him as he rode in a hansom to the North Side the next night after his talk with Converse that he could not bear to lose one more than the other. Both were made for him to adore.

He faltered as he mounted the steps at the Wood home. At the top he turned and looked out over the lake. A wild desire to rush down and throw himself over the sea-wall into the dark, slashing waters came upon him. To go inside meant the end of happiness so far as Celeste Wood was concerned; to turn away would mean the end of his honor and his conscience.

As he stood debating she opened the door and he was trapped. A dazzling light shone in upon his darkness and he staggered forward deeper into its warm radiance, conscious only that a deadly chill had been cast off and that he was in the glow of her smile.

In the dimly lighted hall, red and seductive from the swinging lantern with its antique trappings and scarlet eyes, he removed his overcoat and threw it, with his hat, upon the Flemish chair. Slim, sweet and graceful, she looked up into his somber face. There was a quizzical smile on hers. And now, for the first time, he saw more than friendship in those violet eyes. Plain, too plain, was the glint that brightened the dark pupils; too plain were the roses in her cheeks.

"I know you appear very distinguished and important when you wear that expression, but I'd much rather see you smile," she said, gaily.

"Smiles are too expensive, sometimes," he said, without knowing what he uttered.

"I'll buy them at your own price," she laughed, but a shade of anxiety crossed her face.

"No; I'll trade my dull smiles for your bright ones. It will be enough to cheat, without robbing you," he said, pulling himself together and allowing a dead smile to come to life.

Her den was the most seductive of rooms. It was beautiful, quaint, indolent. Before he dropped into his accustomed chair his muscles were drawn taut; an instant later he was aware of a long sigh and conscious of relaxation. His brain cleared, his courage revived, and he was framing the sentences which were to lead up to that final confession. He had an eager desire to have it over with and to hurry away from her wrath.

She, on the other hand, was all excitement over the report that he was at last to do book-illustrating. She brought a tingling to his heart by her undisguised gladness. Her face was so bright with joy, so alive with interest, that he could but defer striking the blow.

"But perhaps you'd rather talk about some other subject than yourself," she said, finally. "I want to tell you about my brother. He is in Egypt now and he is wild over everything there—perfectly

crazy. A letter came to-day and he gives a wonderful account of a trip to an old town up the Nile. Those boys must be fairly awakening the mummies if we are to judge by his letters. He has set me wild to go to Egypt. Shall I read his letter to you?"

Patiently he listened to an entertaining letter from the boy who was seeing the world with a party of friends. As she read, he watched her face. It was a face to idolize, a face to covet, a face for the memory to subsist upon forever. Stealing into his troubled heart came the realization that this girl was enthroned there beside that other loved one, both for him to worship and both to worship him. There grew into shape, positive and strong, the delightful certainty that these two women could love each other and that in so loving could share his honest love, for now he believed that his love was big enough to envelope them both. As she read to him this dream mastered and enslaved him and his heart expanded, letting in the love of this second petitioner, dividing the kingdom fairly that she might reign with the one already there. He convinced himself that he loved two women honestly, purely and with his whole soul. He loved unreservedly and equally Justine, his wife, and Celeste, his friend.

"You're not listening at all," she cried, dropping the letter suddenly. "What are you thinking of?"

"Of—of the very strangest of things," he stammered.

"But not of the letter? I am so sorry I bored you with——"

"Stop! Please, stop! Pardon me, I—I—for God's sake, let me think!" he burst out, starting to his feet. He strode to the window and, with his back to her, looked out into the night. The action, sudden and inexplicable, brought flashes of red and white to her face, and then a steady glow—the flush not of indignation, but of joy. A heart throb sent the blood tingling through her veins and a smile flew to her startled face. Her eyes melted with a sweet, tender joy and her whole being was suffused with the radiance of understanding. Woman's intuition told her all, and, with clasped hands, she looked upon the motionless figure. One hand went out toward him as if to lead him into the light of her love. He loved her!

She went to the piano and gently, with a soft smile on her lips, began to play "La Paloma," the daintiest of waltzes, for her heart was dancing. At last he turned slowly and looked upon the player. Her back was toward him. His eyes took in the picture—the white shoulders and neck,

"HIS EYES TOOK IN THE PICTURE."

the pretty head, the dark hair and the red rose. All his good resolutions, all his remorse, all his honor fled with the first glance. The dullness left his eyes and in its stead came the flaring spark of passion. He strode impulsively to her side and when she glanced up in confusion, her eyes found the refuge they had sought—the awakened love in his.

"O, Jud!" she murmured, faint and happy.

"Celeste!" he whispered, hoarsely, his face almost in her hair. "I worship you! I adore you!"

He crushed her in his arms and she smiled through her tears.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT SEA.

EVEN at that moment he thought of the wrong he was doing Justine, forgetting that he was blasting the life of the other one. And again, when he asked Celeste to be his wife, he thought of the cruel deception he was practicing upon Justine. Not till afterwards did he fully realize that he had deceived Celeste a thousand fold more grossly than Justine—for Justine was his lawful wife, Celeste his victim.

And yet that night he gained her promise to be his wife, calmly, remorselessly leading her to the sacrifice of love. It was enough for the moment that he loved her and that she loved him. As he hurried homeward with her kisses tingling on his lips, he whispered joyously to himself that he loved them both and that he could live for them both—worshiping one no more than the other. And he slept that night with a smile of happiness on his lips.

The day for the wedding was set, and it was not until then that his eyes were opened to the wrong he was doing Celeste. She could not be his wife.

All the marriage vows in the land could not bind her to him in law. For the first time he realized that reality. But to his rescue came the assurance that he loved her and that she was his in the holy sight of God, if not in the wretched laws of man. He saw the wrong of it all, but he made his own law and he made his wrong a right. As he made his arrangements for the marriage he was afraid that something like conscience might overthrow him before his desires could be realized.

Blissfully ignorant and deeply in love, she filled him with joy by naming a day just one month from that on which he told her that he loved her. Acceding again to his wishes, for his eager will, urged on by fear, carried her with it, she agreed to a very quiet wedding.

The power of his love—the love which shrank and trembled with the fear that it might be thwarted—carried everything before it, sweeping honor and dishonor into a heap which he called the mountain of happiness, and he resolved that it should be strong and enduring.

A week before the wedding day he went to Justine, utterly conscienceless, glorying in his love for her, rejoicing in his capacity to share it with another. Happy were the day and night he spent with her. She gave him the fullness of a love long

restrained, long pent-up. She had not seen him in more than three months. All the unhappiness, all the joylessness, all the lonesomeness were swept away by the return of this handsome boy, her husband, her Jud.

It must be confessed that she felt some uneasiness lest he meet 'Gene Crawley on the place and lest the long averted catastrophe might occur. She felt guilty in that she was deceiving Jud in regard to 'Gene. That was her greatest sin! But Crawley went to the village on that day. He had seen Jud enter the gate the evening before while he was doing the work about the barn, and had slunk back to his lodging place in Martin Grimes' barn. An ugly hatred came into the soul Justine had tempered until it was gentler than one could have supposed 'Gene Crawley's soul could be. The little farm looked fairly prosperous. Jud did not know that the season had turned unproductive and that Justine had been forced to observe the utmost frugality in order to make both ends meet.

And so he basked in her love and then went away, loving her more deeply than ever. He told her of his hopes and his desires and of his struggles to go ahead. Some time, he was sure, he could take her to the city and they could be happy forever.

"Poor Jud," she said, with tears in her eyes.

"You are so lonesome, so unhappy! I wish I could be with you. But we are so awfully, awfully poor, aren't we?"

"Cruelly poor, dear, is better. You haven't had a new dress in a year, and look at these clothes of mine."

He was wearing once more the wretched garments in which he was married! Down at the toll-gate Jim Hardesty said to the crowd the day after his departure for Chicago:

"He's made a fizzle uv it, boys. Gol-dinged, ef I c'n make it out. 'Peared as though he wuz bound to make it go up yander an' I'd 'a' bet my last chaw tebaccer 'at he'd 'a' got to be president er somethin' two year' ago. But he's fell down somehow. I never did see sitch a wreck as him. He don't look 's if he had money 'nough to git a good squar' meal. No wonder he ain't been to see her. It's too dern' fer to walk."

A week afterwards Justine received a letter from Jud. With pale face and crushed heart she read and re-read it. It brought grief and joy, terror and gladness, distress and pride. In her solitude she wept piteously, but whether with joy or sadness she could not have told.

"And now I must tell you of the great good luck that has befallen me. It means that poor Jud

Sherrod is to have the greatest opportunity that ever came to a man. I am going to Europe, across the ocean, dearest. Can you imagine such a thing? Think of me going to Europe, think of me sailing across the sea. I'll believe it when I find that I am not really dreaming. Truly, it is too wonderful to be true. How I wish I could take you with me. But think of the wonderful things I'll have to tell you when I come back. I can tell you of Paris, London, Rome and all the places we have talked and read about so often together. Am I not fortunate to have such a friend as the one who is to give me this unheard of chance? I must tell you that I don't think I deserve it at all. Some day my benefactor will learn that kindness can be wasted and that barrenness sometimes follows the best of sowing. This friend, of whom I shall write you more fully when I have obtained consent, is so deeply interested in me and my future that the art schools in Europe are to be made accessible to me—poverty-stricken me—because of that interest. There is so much to be gained by a brief tour of Europe and by a short stay in the big art schools that my benefactor says it would be criminal for me to be deprived of the chance because I have no money. We are to go together and we are to stay several months, possibly six. I am to have the best

of instruction and am to have the additional lessons acquired only by travel. When I come back to this country I shall be ready to startle the world. We sail next week and I don't know just where we are to go after first reaching England. Of course, I shall write to you every day, dearest, and I shall think of you every moment. It is for you that I am building all my future. When I am rich and famous, we will go to Europe together, you and I. I am so rushed now for time, getting ready and everything, that I cannot come to see you before I go, but you must pray for me and you must love me more than ever. At the end of this week I give up my place on the paper, and when I come back I expect to open a studio of my own. The only thing I hate about the affair is that I must leave you, but it won't be so hard for you to bear, will it, dear? You know it is for my own and your good."

When all the misery of losing him for months, when all the dread of losing him forever, perhaps, in that voyage across the awful sea, had been lost in the joy over *his* good fortune, Justine gloried. Though her voice trembled and grew faint and her eyes glistened as she read the news to Mrs. Crane and 'Gene, it was from pride and joy. How proud she was of him!

A week later Dudley Sherrod and wife sailed from New York. As the huge ship left the dock, Celeste, clasping his arm and looking up into his face, somber with thoughts of the future, exclaimed:

"We are at sea! We are at sea!"

"Yes," he said, slowly. "We are at sea."

"I see in a Chicago paper that a feller named Dudley Sherrod wuz married t'other day," remarked Postmaster Hardesty to Parson Marks while the latter was waiting for his mail at the tollgate a few days later. "Cur'os, how derned big this world is, ain't it, parson?"

"Oh, Chicago is a world in itself," said the parson.

"Kinder startled me when I seen that name," Jim went on, pausing in his perusal of a postal card directed to Martin Grimes. "By ginger, Martin's been buyin' hogs up in Grant township—I mean—er—I sh'd say that this is a derned big world," he stammered, guiltily dropping the card behind the counter. "I reckon there's a hunderd Sherrods in Chicago, though."

"Oh, I daresay you'd find three or four Dudley Sherrods there if you looked through the directory."

"Our Jud has jist gone to the old country, Harve Crose tells me."

"Is it possible?"

"Goin' to take some drawin' lessons, I believe."

"I am very glad to hear that he has such a remarkable opportunity. But I was under the impression that he had little or no money." Mr. Marks was now deeply interested.

"Harve said somethin' about a friend payin' all the expenses because he took a likin' to Jud."

"And what provision has he made for Justine?"

"Well, now you're askin' somethin' I cain't answer. Harve's such a derned careless fool he didn't ast anythin' about that part of it."

Later in the afternoon Mr. Marks drove back to the tollgate and asked Hardesty if he had kept the paper containing the notice of the wedding in Chicago. He could not account for the feeling that inspired this act on his part. Something indefinable had formed itself in his brain and he could not rest until he had settled it within himself.

Few Chicago papers found their way into this section of Indiana. Clay township was peculiarly isolated. Its people were lowly, and comfortable in the indifference of the lowly to the progress of the world aside from its politics, its wars and its

markets. Farm papers, family story papers and the *Glenville Weekly Tomahawk* provided the reading for these busy, homely people. Jim Hardesty "took" a Chicago paper, but he was usually too busy whittling and telling stories to read much more than the headlines.

"Dinged if I know what I done with it, parson," said Jim, scratching his head thoughtfully. " 'Pears to me I wrapped some bacon up in it fer Mis' Trimmer yesterday. Anythin' pertickler you wanted to see about the weddin'?"

"Do you remember what it said about the wedding?"

"Lemme see, what did it say? Said the groom wuz from northern Indiana—up about Fort Wayne, I think. The girl's name wuz—hold on a minute—what wuz her name? Wood—that's it. Swell people, I guess. This feller wuz an artist, too. Say, that's kinder queer, ain't it?"

"A coincidence—a rare coincidence, I must say."

"Course, it couldn't 'a' been our Jud," said Jim, conclusively. "He's already married."

"Oh, no, no! Of course not, Mr. Hardesty. He is devoted to Justine and—and——"

"An' a man 'at's got any sense ain't goin' to load hisself down with two when it's so derned hard to

git rid of one," grinned Jim, referring to his own connubial condition.

"And bigamy is a very serious crime. I wonder if any one else in the neighborhood has noticed the similarity of names?"

"I ain't heerd no one mention it, Mr. Marks. By ginger, you ain't got no—er—suspicions, have ye?" asked Jim, suddenly acute. Mr. Marks stammered confusedly and assured him that no such thought had entered his head.

"Would you mind giving me Dudley's Chicago address?" he asked, at last, that same indefinable something struggling for recognition.

"He's half way to Europe by this time," explained Jim.

"I feel that it would be wise to secure a letter from Jud himself in case rumor confuses him with this other man. It would be just to him and to Justine, Mr. Hardesty. If you'll give me his address I'll write to him and we can have his own word for it in case people get to talking."

"Then you *are* afraid people will think it's Jud?" demanded Jim.

"You cannot tell what people might think and say," said the parson, sagely. "And, by the way, did Mrs. Hardesty see that notice in the paper?"

"Naw! She's too busy readin' that continued

story in the *Wife's Own Magazine.* Thunder! I wouldn't even hint to her that it might be Jud! She's jest the woman to swear it wuz him anyhow, an' she'd peddle it over the country quicker'n scat. But, course, it cain't be Jud, so what's the use worryin' about it? This is a thunderin' big world, as I said before, Mr. Marks, an' they do say that up in Indianapolis there is sixty-four fellers named James Hardesty. Gosh, I hope my wife never gits it into her head that I've got sixty-four other wives, jist because the name's the same. She'd never git tired askin' me about that trip I took to Indianapolis six year' ago with the rest o' the G. A. R. boys from Glenville."

Nevertheless, Mr. Marks wrote to Jud Sherrod, delicately referring to the strange similarity in names and to the embarrassment he might suffer if the community came to regard him as identical with the Chicago bridegroom. The letter was nothing less than a deliberate command for Dudley Sherrod to say "guilty" or "not guilty."

Weeks afterwards, from across the sea, came a reply from Jud in all the cold dignity of a conscience in defense. He closed with these words:

"I have but one wife—the one whom God and the law has given me. You will greatly oblige me, Mr. Marks, by informing any inquiring person in

your community that Justine is my wife and that I am not the Sherrod who was married in Chicago. Thank you for your interest in Justine and me."

CHAPTER XVIII.

'GENE CRAWLEY'S SERMON.

"'GENE, 'tain't none o' my business, understan', but 'pears to me you ain't doin' a very sensible thing in hirin' out to Jestine Sherrod like this. She'd oughter have some one else down there 'tendin' to the place. You ain't the feller, take it jest how you please. She's all alone, 'cept ole Mis' Crane, an' folks is boun' to talk, dang 'em. I don't think it's jest right fer you to be there."

"There ain't nothin' wrong in it, Martin. There ain't a thing. Do you think there is?"

"W—e—ll, no, not that, 'zackly, but it gives people a chanst to *say* there's somethin' wrong," said Mr. Grimes, shifting his feet uncomfortably. The two men were standing in the farmer's barnyard about a fortnight after it became generally known in the community that Jud had gone to Europe. "Y'see, ever'body reecollects that nasty thing you said down to the tollgate the night o' the weddin'. 'Tain't human natur' to fergit sich a brag as that wuz. What a goshamighty fool you wuz to talk like——"

"Oh, I know I wuz, I know it. Don't be a throwin' it up to me, Martin. I wish I'd never said it. I wish I'd died while I wuz sayin' it so's I could 'a' gone right straight to hell to pay fer it. I wuz a crazy man, Martin, that's what I wuz. Ever'body knows I didn't mean it, don't they?"

"W—e—ll, mos' ever'body knows you couldn't kerry out yer boast, no matter ef you meant it er not. But, you c'n see fer yerself 'at your workin' over on her place ain't jest the thing, with all the talk 'at went on a couple year ago. Like's not ever'thing's all proper an' they ain't no real harm in it, but——"

"Look here, Martin Grimes, do you mean to insinyate that it ain't proper? 'Cause ef you do, somethin's goin' to drap an' drap all-fired hard," exclaimed 'Gene, his brow darkening.

"Don't be so techy, 'Gene. I ain't insinyated a blame thing; cain't you see I'm tryin' to lay the hull case afore you clearly? 'Tain't no use beatin' roun' the bush, nuther. She's boun' to be compermised."

Crawley stared long and silently at a herd of cattle on the distant hillside.

"Martin," he said, at last, "that girl's made a different man of me. I ain't the same ornery cuss I wuz a couple of year ago. Anybody c'n see that.

I ain't teched a mouthful of whisky fer purty nigh a year. Seems to me I don't keer a damn to swear —I mean I don't keer to swear any more. That one slipped out jest because talkin' to you like this kind o' takes me back to where I used to be. I go to church purty reg'lar, don't I? Well, it's all her. She's made a different man of me, I tell you, an' I wouldn't do her no wrong if the hull world depended on it. She's the best woman that ever lived, that's what she is. An' she keers more fer Jud Sherrod's little finger than fer all the balance of the world put together. There ain't no honester girl in Clay township, an' darn me, if ever I hear anybody say anything mean ag'in her, I'll break his neck. I'm helpin' her over on the place, an' she's payin' me wages, jest like she'd pay any hand, an' I don't know whose business it is but her'n an' mine."

"I know all that, 'Gene, but people don't——"

"Who in thunder is the people? A lot of old women who belong to church, an' go to sociables jest to run one 'nother down, an' all the time there ain't one-tenth of 'em that ain't jealous of the women they think's goin' wrong. They're so derned selfish an' evil-minded that they cain't even imagine another woman doin' somethin' that ain't right without feelin' jealous as blazes an' gittin' dissatisfied with ever'thing around 'em. You cain't tell me

nothin' about these old scarecrows that keep a sign hangin' out all the time—'virtue is its own reward.' Say, Martin, you don't suppose that I'm the only hired hand workin' around these parts, do you?" snarled 'Gene, malevolently.

"No, course not, but—what you mean, 'Gene?"

"I'm not the only man that's workin' on a farm where there's a woman, am I?" grated 'Gene.

"Lookee here, 'Gene, 'splain yerself. That don't sound very well," exclaimed Martin, turning a shade paler and glancing uneasily toward his own house.

"There ain't nothin' to explain, but it's somethin' to think about, Martin. You c'n tell that to all the old women you see, too, an' mebby they won't do so much thinkin' about Justine Van. That's all. If I'd waited fer any of these other women 'round here to do me a good turn, I'd be worse than I ever wuz. 'Tain't in 'em, Martin; all they c'n do is to cackle an' look around to see if they got wings sproutin' on theirselves. They don't think of nobody else, unless they think bad. Justine ain't that sort, I want to tell you. Here I wuz, her enemy, an' no friend of her husband's. I'd done a hull lot o' mean things to her an' him. But did she hold it up ag'in me when the chanst come fer her to do some good fer me? No, sir, she

didn't. She tole me that I had the makin' of a man in me, an' then she tuck holt of me an' give me a new start. She said I wuz a beast an' a drunkard an' a coward, an' a hull lot o' things, but she said I could be a good man if I'd try. So I tried, an' I hadn't no idee it wuz so easy. She done it an' she don't keer no more fer me than she does fer that spotted calf of your'n over yander. Now, I want to tell you somethin', Martin. She needs me down there on the place an' I'm goin' to stay there till she tells me to quit. Then I'm goin' to quit like a man. It don't make no difference what I said two er three year ago, either, 'cause I'm not the same man I wuz then. If Clay township don't like the way I'm doin', let 'em say so an' be done with it. Then we'll settle some scores."

Grimes shuffled his feet frequently and expectorated nervously without regard to direction or consequences during this unusually long speech. Mrs. Grimes was recognized as one of the most ravenous gossips in the neighborhood, and her husband knew it. Yet he was too much in dread of Crawley's prowess to take up the cudgels in her defense. He had also suspected, years before, that she was in love with one of his "hired men"; hence his uneasiness under 'Gene's implications.

"You better not talk too much, 'Gene," he said

at last. "I'm yer friend, but I cain't stave off the hull township fer you. Ef it gits out that you're making sich bold talk an' braggin'——"

"Braggin'! Who's braggin'? I mean ever' word I said, an' a heap sight more, too. You jest tell 'em what I said an' let 'em come to me. But if any of 'em goes to Justine with their sneakin' tales an' their cussed lies, I'll not stop to see whether it's a man er a woman. I'll wrap 'em up in a knot an' chuck 'em out into the middle of the lane."

"Now, that wouldn't be a wise thing to do, don't you see?" said Grimes, growing more and more uncomfortable. At this point it may be announced that Mr. Grimes had been deputized by his wife to convince 'Gene of the error of his way and of the wrong he was doing Justine. "You'd have the constables down here in two shakes of a dead lamb's tail."

"Old Bill Higgins an' Randy Dixon? They wouldn't try to arrest me if I wuz tied hand an' foot an' chloroformed into the bargain. But, say, there ain't no use talkin' about this thing. I want the folks to know that I'm goin' to stick to Justine an' help her out as long as I can. I'm doin' it honest an' I'm gittin' paid fer it like anybody else. Martin, I don't want to have 'em say anything ag'in her. She's as good as gold an' we all oughter

be proud of her. Jud's in hard luck, I reckon. Leastwise he looked it last time he wuz here. Mebby he'll git on his feet over there in Europe, an' then he c'n do the right thing by her. But I'll tell you, Martin, we all want to stick to her now. She's all broke up an' I c'n see she's discouraged. She wouldn't let on fer the world, allus bright an' happy, but old Mrs. Crane told me t'other day that she'd ketched her cryin' more'n onct. That gosh-darned little farm of her'n ain't payin' a thing, an' I want to tell you she needs sympathy 'nstead of hard words."

"They ain't a soul ever said anything ag'in her, 'Gene," broke in the other. "But they're apt to ef it goes on. But go ahead; you know best, 'Gene, you know best."

"I don't know best, either. That's the trouble. I c'n talk to you an' sweat about it, but I don't know what to do. I'm awful worried about it. Of course, if any responsible person ever said anything wrong she could sue him in the courts, somehow er other, but she'd hate to do that," said 'Gene, reflectively. Plainly, he saw the girl's position better than his loyalty would allow him to admit. Martin started violently at the word "sue" and was from that moment silenced. He lived in terror of a lawsuit and its dangers.

"D'you suppose she'd go to court?"

"She wouldn't want to, but me—me an'—me an' Jud could coax her to do it," said 'Gene, shrewd in an instant. "I don't reckon folks remember about the courts, do they?"

Martin pulled his nerves together sufficiently to send a stream of tobacco juice into a knot-hole in the fence fifteen feet away, and said:

"Well, they'd oughter remember, by ginger!"

After a few minutes of rather energetic chewing for him (Martin rarely chewed tobacco vigorously because of the extravagance), he calmly reopened the conversation.

"When are you liable to git through plantin' over there?"

"In a couple of days, if it keeps dry."

"I'll let Bud Jones go over an' help you ef you need him."

"Oh, I c'n git along, I guess."

"I wuz thinkin' a little of sendin' Bud over this week with a couple bushels of potaters fer Jestine. Never seed sich potaters in my born days."

"I think she's got a plenty, Martin."

"You don't say so. Well, how's she off fer turnips?"

"She could use a few bushels of turnips an' some oats an' little corn, I reckon. Dern it, I believe

she's purty nigh out of hay, too," said 'Gene, soberly.

"Tell her I'll drive over this week with some," said Martin, wiping his brow.

"She'll pay you fer the stuff when you take it over."

"I didn't 'low to ask fer pay."

"Well, she ain't askin' fer favors, either."

Martin stared down the road for some minutes.

"But I got more'n I c'n use," he said.

"If that's the case you c'n send it over an' she'll be mighty thankful. An' say, I guess I c'n use Bud to-morrow an' next day."

"We're purty busy an' I don't see how——"

"Don't send him, then. You said you'd thought of it, you know."

"I'll send him, though, come to think of it. You say pore little Jestine 'pears to be discouraged?"

"Kinder so, I should say. Poor little girl, she's——" Here he leaned over and uttered an almost inaudible bit of information. Martin's eyes bulged and he gasped.

"The devil you say! Well, I'll be danged!"

'Gene started down the lane, his jaws set and hard for the moment. Suddenly he turned, and, with the first chuckle of mirth Grimes had heard from him that day, said:

"Don't fergit to send over them potaters, too, Martin."

Then he trudged rapidly away, leaving Mr. Grimes in a state bordering on collapse. Between the startling bit of information 'Gene had given him, the hint at lawsuits, the insinuation against other women in the locality and his own astounding liberality, he was the most thoroughly confused farmer in Clay township. He went to the house and talked it all over with his wife, and the words of advice that he gave to her savored very much of the mandatory. He dreamed that night that some one sued him for damages and got judgment for $96,000. The next day he sent a wagonload of supplies to Justine, after which he told his wife she could not have the new "calico" he had been promising for three months.

Eugene Crawley's position on the old Van farm was queer. He was a self-appointed slave, as it were. True, he was paid wages and he was given his meals in the little kitchen where Justine and Mrs. Crane ate. That privilege was the one recompense that made slavery a charm. In his undisciplined heart there had grown a feeling of reverence for the wife of Jud Sherrod that displaced the evil love of the long ago. His love, in these days, was pure and hopeless. He thought only of lifting

the burden that another's love had left upon her shoulders. The 'Gene Crawley of old was no more. In his place was a simple, devoted toiler, a lowly worshiper.

Against her will he had attached himself to the farm, and at last he had become indispensable. The fear with which she had once regarded him was gone with the wonderful alteration in his nature. Innocent, unsuspecting child that she was, she thought that his love had died and that it could never be awakened. She did not know the depths of his silent adoration.

At nightfall each day he trudged back to Martin Grimes's barn to sleep, and in the morning, before sunrise, he was at his post of duty again. So thoughtful was he of her welfare that he never lingered after the night's chores were done, realizing that the least indiscretion would give rise to neighborhood gossip. Their conversations were short, but always free and friendly. They met only as necessity obliged and nothing could have been more decorous than their conduct. Yet 'Gene went to his little room in the barn that night with a troubled heart.

"Sure they cain't talk about her," he thought. "She's an angel, if there ever wuz one."

Months before he had said aloud to himself, off

in the field, as he looked toward the house in which his fair employer lived:

"I wouldn't harm her by word er thought fer all heaven. She's honest an' I'm goin' to be. She's Jud's wife an' she loves him, an' I ain't got no right to even think of lovin' her. 'Gene Crawley, you gotter give up. You gotter be honest."

And he was honest.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PURE AND THE POOR.

FOR four months Mr. and Mrs. Dudley Sherrod wandered over Europe. They saw Paris, Venice, Rome, Amsterdam, Brussels, Vienna and quaint German towns, unknown to most American tourists. Celeste had visited the Old World many times before, but it was all new to her now; she was traveling with the man she loved. To Sherrod, the wonders of the land he had never hoped to see were a source of the most intense delight. His artistic, romantic nature leaped under the spur of awakening forces; his love for the beautiful, the glorious, the quaint and the curious was satiated daily. He lived in the perfect glory of the present, doggedly disregarding the past and braving everything that the future might bring forth, good or evil.

Basking in the love of this fair girl, adoring her and being adored, he lost all vestige of conscience. The shadow that hung over him on the wedding day drifted away into forgetfulness, and he saw nothing but the pleasures of life. A dread that the law would surely find him out and snatch him from

the love and respect of two women, devastating the lives of both, was dissipated by degrees until scarcely a line across his brow was left to mark its course within.

Once a week he sent loving letters home to Justine, letters full of tenderness and affection. Often a mist of tears came to his eyes as he thought of her, wishing that she, too, might be with them on this happy tour. At times he saw his selfishness and was ashamed, but the brightness of life with Celeste overcame these touches of remorse and he sank back into the soft cushions of bliss and—forgot. Letters from Justine were rare, and he kissed them passionately and read them over and over again—before he destroyed them. Here and there the Sherrods wandered, the rich and loving wife's purse the provider, dawdling and idling in dreamland.

At last she confessed to him that she was tired of the Continent and was eager to get back to Chicago, where she could have him all to herself in the home over which he was to be master. So deep in luxury and forgetfulness was he, that future pain seemed impossible, and he did not even oppose her wish. But as the steamer drew away from the dock he grasped the rail and for an instant his body turned numb.

"Back to America!" he gasped, realizing at last.

"Oh! how long can I hold it off? What will be the end of it?"

In the meantime, Clay township was in a turmoil of gossip. Poor Justine was discussed from one prayer service to another, and with each succeeding session of the gossips the stories were magnified. Quite unconscious of the storm brewing about her innocent head, she struggled painfully on with her discouraging work, the dullness of life brightened once a week or so by letters from across the sea. Every night she prayed for the safe return of that husband-lover, and there was no hour that did not find her picturing the delights of meeting after these months of separation.

She heard nothing of the wedding that Parson Marks and Jim Hardesty discussed months before. The few Glenville and Clay township people who saw the account in the papers may have regarded the coincidence in names remarkable, but attached no other significance to the affair. Certainly no one mentioned it to Justine. Jud's letter swept the doubts and fears from the mind of Mr. Marks and the incident was forgotten.

From her face there began to disappear the glorious colors of health; the bright eyes were deep with a new wistfulness. But her strong young figure never drooped.

At last 'Gene Crawley became aware of the gossip. He saw the sly looks, the indirect snubs, the significant pauses in conversation, when he or she drew nigh. For weeks he controlled his wrath, grinding his teeth in secret over the injustice of it all. In the end, after days of indecision, he told himself that but one course was left open to him. He must leave the country.

But there was left the task of telling Justine of his resolve. Would she despise him for deserting her in the hour of greatest need? He could not tell her that scandal was driving him away for her sake. To let her know that the neighbors had accused her of being false to Jud would break her heart. To run away surreptitiously would be the act of a coward; to tell her the real reason would be cruel; to leave designedly for a better offer of wages would be base under the circumstances. In the last few weeks she had depended on him for everything; he had become indispensable.

While he was striving to evolve some skillful means of breaking the news to her gently, the populace of Clay township made ready to take the matter in its own hands. Parson Marks, to whom nearly every member of his congregation had come with stories of misconduct at the little place down the lane, finally felt obliged to call a general meet-

ing to consider the wisest plan of action in the premises. The word was passed among the leading members of the church, and it was understood that a secret meeting would be held in the pastor's home on a certain Thursday night. Justine had a few true friends and believers, but they were not asked to be present; no word was permitted to reach the ears of either offender.

That Thursday night came, and with it also came to 'Gene's troubled mind the sudden inspiration to go before the young minister and lay bare his intentions, asking his help and advice.

The "neighbors" timed their arrival at the parson's home so thoughtfully that darkness had spread over the land long before the first arrival drew up and hitched his team in the barn-lot. By half-past eight o'clock there were twenty immaculate souls in the parlor and sitting room of the parsonage, and Mrs. Ed. Harbaugh, the president of the Woman's Home Missionary Society, was called upon to state the object of the meeting, Mr. Marks observing that he preferred to sit as a court of appeals. A stiffer-backed gathering of human beings never assembled under the banner of the Almighty, ready to do battle for Christianity. There was saintly courage in every face and there was determination in every glance of apprehension that

greeted the creaking of a door or the nicker of a horse. When Jim Hardesty, while trying to hitch his horse to a fence post in a dark corner of the barn-lot, exploded as follows: "Whoa, damn ye!" everybody shivered, and Mrs. Bolton said she wondered "how 'Gene Crawley heerd about the meetin'." Mr. Hardesty never could understand why his entrance a few minutes later was the signal for such joy.

"It's our bounding duty," said Mrs. Harbaugh in conclusion, "to set right down as a committee an' directate a letter to Jud Sherrod, tellin' him jest how things is bein' kerried on over to his house. That pore feller is off yander in Europe or Páris some'ere's, doin' his best to git ahead in the world, an' his wife is back here cuttin' up as if old Satan hisself had got into her."

"But how air we to git a letter to Jed ef we don't know where he's at?" demanded Mr. Hardesty. "I been workin' fer the gover'ment long enough to know that you cain't git a letter to a feller 'nless it's properly addressed. Now, who knows where he's to be found?" The speaker looked very wise and important. The truth is, he was inclined to favor Justine, but his wife's stand in the controversy made it imperative for him to express other views.

"I sh'd think a postal card would catch him at Europe," volunteered Ezekiel Craig. Parson Marks stared at the speaker.

"But Europe is not a city, Mr. Craig," he said.

"No, of course not," exclaimed Mr. Hardesty, contemptuously. "It's an umpire."

"Well, I didn't know," murmured Mr. Craig, and his voice was not heard again until he said good-night to the door post when he left the parson's house.

"Mebby somebody could find out his address from Justine," said Mrs. Grimes. "Needn't let on what it's fer, y' see, an' thataway we couldn't take no chances on wastin' a stamp."

"I kin ast her," said Mrs. Bolton. "I'm goin' over to her house to-morry to see if I c'n borry a couple pounds o' sugar. Dear me, I never did have sitch luck with watermillon preserves as I'm havin' this year. Silas, I leave it to you if I ain't sp'iled more——"

"We ain't yere to talk about preserves, Liz, so shet up," interrupted her better half sourly.

"That's right, Si. I wish to gosh I could shet mine up like that," said Mr. Hardesty, enviously.

"Why, Jim Hardesty, you ain't sayin' that I talk too much," cried his wife, indignantly.

"You don't say 'leven words a day, my dove,"

said he, arising and bowing so low that his suspenders creaked threateningly. Then he winked broadly at the assemblage, and the women tittered, whereupon Mrs. Hardesty glared at them greenly.

"We are getting away from the subject, please," came the mild reproof of the pastor.

"How fer had we got?" demanded Deacon Bossman.

"We hain't got anywheres yet," said Mrs. Harbaugh. "That's what we're talkin' about, deacon."

"Hain't found out where Jud's at yet?"

"Have you been asleep?" demanded the chairman.

"I'd like to know how in thund—I mean, how in tarnation—er—how in the world I could go to sleep with all you women talkin' to onct about dresses an' so forth——"

"We ain't mentioned dress to-night," snorted the chairman. "You better 'tend to——"

"Come, come; we must get along with the business," remonstrated the pastor.

"I want to make a motion," said the postmaster, rising impressively. When he had secured the attention of the crowd he walked solemnly to the door, opened it and expectorated upon the porch. Then, wiping his lips with the back of his hairy hand, he returned to his position in the circle.

"I move you, Mr. Cheerman—er, Mrs. Cheerman, beggin' your excuse—that we app'int a committee to see how much truth they is in these reports afore we go to puttin' our foot—er, properly speakin'—our feets in it too da—too extry deep." There was a dead silence and Jim looked serenely up at the right-hand corner of the parson's clothes-press, expecting the wrath of the virtuous to burst about him at any moment.

"I don't think we need any more committee than our own eyes, Jim," said his wife, feeling her way.

"Well, then, if that's the case, I move you we app'int a committee of hearts to work j'intly with the eyes," said James, soberly, still looking at the closet.

"I make an amendment," said Mrs. Bolton sharply. "Mrs. Cheerman, I amend that we app'int a committee of three to go to Justine an' tell her this thing's got to stop an'——"

"It seems to me——" began Mr. Marks.

"I think it'd be best if we'd write to her an' sign no name," said Mrs. Grimes.

"That's a good idy," mused Mr. Bolton.

"Mrs. Cheerman, I withdraw my motion," said Hardesty. "I move you now that we app'int a committee composed of Mr. Bolton, Mr. Craig an'

Mr. Grimes to go an' notify 'Gene Crawley 'nstead of her."

A shiver swept through the room. The men gasped and the perspiration started on their foreheads. Their wives moved a bit closer to them and looked appealingly toward the chairman. Postmaster Hardesty had considerable difficulty in suppressing a chuckle.

"What's the use seein' 'Gene?" stammered Martin Grimes. "He ain't to be reasoned with 't all, Jim, an' you know it."

"Well, you might *try* it," insisted Jim.

"I think Justine's the most likely to be sensible," said Bolton.

"Course, she'd cry an' take on turrible, while ef you went to 'Gene he might do somethin' else, so I guess it'd be best to have a committee go over an' tell her fust. She could break it gentle-like to 'Gene, y' see," agreed Hardesty, reflectively. "'N'en he could do jest as he liked."

"Come to think of it," said Grimes, "I reckon it's best to write to Jud."

"Then I'll move you, Mrs. Chairman, that the secretary address a letter to Mr. Sherrod, setting forth the facts as they exist," said Pastor Marks.

"I can't do it alone," cried meek little Miss Cunningham, the school teacher.

"We c'n all help," said Grimes, mightily relieved. "Git out yer writin' paper."

The secretary nervously prepared to write the letter. Her pen scratched and every eye was glued on the holder as it wobbled vigorously above her knuckles.

"I've got this far: 'Judley Sherrod, Esq., Dear Sir,' " she said. "What next?"

"His name is Dudley," corrected the parson.

"Oh," murmured the secretary, blushing. Then she wrote it all over again on another piece of paper.

"You might say something like this," said Mr. Marks, thoughtfully. " 'It is with pain that we feel called upon to acquaint you with the state of affairs in your home.' Have you written that?"

" 'Fate of astairs in your home,' " read Miss Cunningham. Mr. Hardesty was looking over her shoulder, and at times his unconscious chin-whiskers tickled her rosy ear.

" 'We are sure that you will forgive the nature of this missive, and yet we know that it will hurt you far beyond the pain of the most cruel sword thrust. You, to whom we all extend the deepest love and respect, must prepare to receive a shock, but you must bear it with Christian fortitude.' Do I go too fast, Miss Cunningham?"

" 'You, who toom'—I mean—'to whom, etc.' " wrote the secretary.

"Sounds like we're trying to tell him there's a death in the family," said Mr. Hardesty.

" 'Your wife has been left so long to the mercies of the——' No; please change that, Miss Secretary. 'Your wife has not conducted herself as a good woman should. She has forgotten her wifely honor——' "

"Good Lord!" came a hoarse voice from the hallway. The assemblage turned and saw Eugene Crawley. Jim Hardesty afterwards admitted that he did not "breathe fer so long that his lungs seemed air-tight when he finally did try to git wind into 'em."

"What's goin' on here?" grated the unwelcome visitor, after a long pause. He was half-stunned by what he had heard, having entered the hall just as the letter was begun. So intent were the others that no one heard his knock or his entrance.

"Why—why," stammered Mr. Marks, "we were—ahem—writing to——"

"I know what you were doin', so you needn't lie about it, parson. You're writin' a pack o' lies to Jud Sherrod, a pack o' lies about *her*. That's what you're doin'. Who's the one that started this dirty piece of business? How'd you come to meet here

this way? Why don't you answer?" snarled Crawley, stepping inside the door.

"We jest happened to drop in an'——" murmured Mr. Bolton from behind his wife.

"You're a liar, Sam Bolton. You're all liars. You come here to ruin that poor girl forever, that's all there is to it. I come here, parson, to ask you to help me befriend her. An' what do I find? You—you, a minister of the gospel—helpin' these consarned cats an' dogs here to jest naturally claw that girl to pieces. You git up an' preach about charity an' love an' all that stuff in your pulpit, an' I set down in front an' believe you're an honest man an' mean what you say. That's what you preach; but if God really let such pups as you 'tend to His business down here He'd be a fool, an' a sensible man had better steer clear of Him. The size of the matter is, you meal-mouthed sneak, God made a mistake when you was born. He thought you'd be a fish-worm an' he give you a fish-worm's soul. What are you goin' to do with that letter?"

"Eugene, will you let me speak earnestly to you for a few moments?" asked the young parson. He felt, uncomfortably, that he might be blushing.

"You'll have to speak earnest an' quick, too," returned the other. "Don't talk to me about my soul, parson, an' all that stuff. I c'n take care of

"'YOU'RE A LIAR—YOU'RE ALL LIARS.'"

my soul a heap sight better'n you kin, I've jest found out. So, cut it short. What you got to say fer yourself, not fer me?"

"It is time you and she were made to understand the penalty your awful sin will bring down upon——"

"Stop! You c'n say what you please about me, but if you breathe a sound ag'in her I'll fergit that you're a preacher. It won't do no good to plead with you people, but all I c'n say is that she don't deserve a single harsh word from any one. She's the best woman I ever knowed, that's what she is. She's been one of your best church people an' she's as pure as an angel. That's more'n you c'n say fer another man er woman in your congregation. Don't look mad, Mrs. Grimes. I mean what I say. You are the meanest lot of people that God ever let live, if you keep on tryin' to make her out bad. This thing's gone fer enough. I know I'm not a good man—I ain't fit to live in the same world with her—but she's been my friend after all the ugly things I done to her an' Jud. I come here to-night, parson, to tell you I wuz goin' to leave her place an' to ask you to tell her why. Now, I'm goin' to stay an' I'm goin' to make you an' all the rest of these folks go over an' tell her you're her friends."

"I'll do nothing of the sort," snapped Mrs. Harbaugh.

"Yes, you will, Mis' Harbaugh, an' you'll do it to-morrow," said 'Gene, his black eyes narrowing and gleaming at her.

"Mr. Crawley, you must certainly listen to reason," began the preacher, softly.

"Not until you listen to it yerself," was the answer. "You are committin' an outrage an' you've *got* to stop it right now." He strode across to where Miss Cunningham sat. Pointing his finger at the partially written letter he said: "Tear that letter up! Tear it up!"

The paper crackled and fluttered to the floor from the secretary's nerveless fingers. He picked it up himself and scattered the pieces about the table.

"Now, how many of you are goin' to kerry this thing any further?" he demanded, wheeling about and glaring at the speechless crowd. There was not a sign of response. "How many of you are goin' to treat her fair?" he went on.

"We intend to treat her fair," said Mr. Marks.

"Do you call it fair to write a letter like that?"

"'Gene's right, by ginger," cried Jim Hardesty. "Shake, 'Gene. I've been ag'in this thing all along."

"I never did approve of it," said Mr. Bolton.

"Nobody could ever make me believe 'at Justine ever done anything wrong," said Mr. Bossman, emphatically. "You know how I objected to this thing, Maria."

The women looked nervous and ready to weep.

"Mebby we've been too hasty," said Mrs. Harbaugh, in a whining tone.

"I'm goin' over to Justine's to-morry, pore girl," said Mrs. Bolton.

"I'm goin' home now," said 'Gene, "but I want to say jest this: I'll see that she gits fair play. Now, you mark that, every one of you. An' as fer you, parson, I want to say, bad as I am, that I'm too good a man to go inside your church ag'in."

He went out, slamming the door behind him. After a long pause James Hardesty exploded:

"Who in thunder called this meetin', anyhow?"

CHAPTER XX.

THE SOCIABLE.

ON the day following the meeting at the home of Parson Marks, Justine was surprised to receive visits from half a dozen of the leaders in the church society. Mrs. Harbaugh came first, followed soon afterwards by Mrs. Grimes. The "chairman" was graciousness itself. Crawley, from a field nearby, saw the women drive up, one by one, and a grim smile settled on his face.

"I'd like to be in the front room just to hear what the old hens say to Justine," he mused; "I'll bet she's the surprisedest girl in the world. I hope they don't say anything 'bout that meetin', an' what I done to 'em last night. It 'u'd hurt her terrible."

Properly subdued, Mrs. Harbaugh did a surprising thing—and no one was more surprised than she. On the way over to Justine's place the ex-chairman had been racking her brain for a motive to explain the visit—the first she ever had accorded Justine. Mrs. Harbaugh, it may be said, regarded

herself as "quality," and was particular about her associates.

Mrs. Sherrod was very uncomfortable and so was Mrs. Harbaugh during the first five minutes of that visit. They sat in the cold, dark little "front room," facing one another stiffly, uttering disjointed commonplaces. Before Mrs. Harbaugh realized what she was doing, she committed herself to an undertaking that astonished the whole neighborhood.

"Justine, I 've been thinking of giving a sociable an' an oyster supper next week, an' I want you to be sure to come," she said in desperation, after a long and trying silence.

Now, the truth is, such a thought had not entered Mrs. Harbaugh's head until that very moment. She felt called upon to do something to prove her friendship for the girl, but, now that she had done it, she would have given worlds to recall the impulse and the words. In her narrow heart she believed the worst of Justine. How could she reconcile her conscience to this sudden change of front? She had been the most bitter of denunciators—in fact, she herself had suggested the meeting of the night before. And now she was deliberately planning a "sociable" for the sole purpose of asking the girl to be one of her guests!

Mrs. Harbaugh was beginning to wonder if her mind was affected.

Justine was speechless for a moment or two. She was not sure that she had heard aright.

"A sociable, Mrs. Harbaugh?" she asked.

"And an oyster supper," added the other, desperately.

"I—I should like to come, but—I am not sure that I can," said Justine, doubtfully. She was thinking of her scant wardrobe.

"Oh, you must come. I won't take 'no' for an answer," cried Mrs. Harbaugh, who hoped in her heart that Justine would not come. For the first time she bethought herself of the expense, then of her husband's wrath when he heard of the project. Next to the Grimeses, the Harbaughs were the "closest" people in the township.

While Justine was trying to frame excuses for not attending the party, Mrs. Harbaugh was just as earnestly explaining that "bad weather," "sickness," "unforeseen acts of Providence," and a lot of other emergencies might necessitate a postponement, but, in case nothing happened to prevent, the "sociable" would take place on "Friday night a week." Mrs. Grimes came in while the discussion was still on. When she was told of Mrs. Harbaugh's plan to entertain the "best people in the

neighborhood," Mrs. Grimes made a remark that promptly decided the giving of the party.

"My sakes, Mrs. Harbaugh, how c'n you afford it? We couldn't, I know, an' I guess Martin's 'bout as well off as the next one 'round about here," she said superciliously.

Mrs. Harbaugh bridled. "Oh, I guess we c'n afford it an' more, too, Mrs. Grimes, if we'd a mind to. I know that most people 'bout here is mighty hard up, but who's to give these pleasant little entertainments unless it's them that's in good circumstances? That's the way Mr. Harbaugh an' me feels about it."

Mrs. Harbaugh was hopelessly committed to the "sociable." Other women came in and they soon were in a great flutter of excitement over the coming event. Justine was amazed by this exhibition of interest and friendship on the part of her rich neighbors. She did not understand the significant smiles that went among the visitors as each new arrival swelled the crowd in the "front room." The look of surprise that marked each face on entering the room was succeeded almost instantly by one best described as "sheepish." Not a woman there but felt herself ashamed to be caught in the act of obeying 'Gene Crawley's injunction so speedily.

Bewildered, Justine promised to attend the "sociable." The meaning expressed in the sly glances, smirks, and poorly concealed sniffs escaped her notice. She did not know what every one else knew perfectly well—that Mrs. Harbaugh's party was a peace-offering—and a sacrifice that almost drew blood from the calloused heart of the "chairman."

That evening she told 'Gene of the visitation from the "high an' mighty" (as Crawley termed the Clay "aristocrats"), and she made no effort to conceal her distress.

"How can I go to the party, 'Gene?" she said in despair. "I have nothing to wear—absolutely nothing——"

"Now, that's the woman all over," scoffed Crawley, resorting to badinage. "I wouldn't let that worry me, Justine. Go ahead an' have a good time. The clothes you've got are a heap sight more becomin' th'n the fine feathers them hens wear. Lord 'a' mercy, I think they're sights!"

"But, 'Gene, it's the first time any one of them has been to see me in months," she protested, dimly conscious of distrust.

"Well, I—I guess they've been purty busy," said he, lamely. Crawley was a poor dissembler.

"Besides, I don't care to go. Jud isn't here, and

—and, oh, I can't see how it could give me any pleasure."

'Gene shifted from one foot to the other. He was beginning to accuse himself of adding new tribulation to Justine's heavy load. He had not anticipated such quick results from his onslaught of the night before, nor had he any means of knowing to what length the women might go in their abasement. That they had surrendered so abjectly had given him no little satisfaction until he had seen that Justine was distressed.

"You'll have a good time, Justine. Ever'body does, I reckon. Seems like they want you to come purty bad, too," he said encouragingly.

"They really did insist," she agreed, smiling faintly. Crawley's gaze wavered and then fell. Out in the barn-lot, later in the evening, he worked himself into a rare state of indignation.

"If them folks don't treat her right over at the 'sociable' they'd oughter be strung up," he was growling to himself. "If I thought they wuz just doin' this to git a chanct to hurt her feelin's some way, I'd—I'd——" But he could think of nothing severe enough to meet the demand.

Mr. Harbaugh did just as his wife expected he would do when she broke the news to him. He stormed and fumed and forgot his position as a

deacon of the church. Two days passed before he submitted, and she was free to issue her invitations. Their social standing in the neighborhood was such that only the "best people" could be expected to enjoy their hospitality.

"How air you goin' to invite 'Gene Crawley 'thout astin' all the other hired men in the township? He ain't no better'n the rest," argued Mr. Harbaugh sarcastically.

"I'm not goin' to invite Mr. Crawley," said his wife firmly.

"Well, then, what air you givin' the shindig fer? I thought it was fer the purpose o' squarin' things regardin' them two."

"We are under no obligations to 'Gene. Besides, he's no gentleman. He ain't fit to step inside the parlor."

"I noticed he stepped into one t'other night, all right," grinned Mr. Harbaugh.

"I s'pose you are defending him," snapped his wife.

"'Pears to me he c'n keer fer himse'f purty well. He don't need no defendin'. But, say—don't you think he'll rare up a bit if he don't git a bid to the party?"

"Well, he won't take it out o' me," she spoke, meaningly.

"Course not," he exclaimed. "That's the tarnation trouble of it; he'll take it out o' me." Mr. Harbaugh involuntarily glanced over his shoulder as though expecting Crawley to appear in the doorway as mysteriously as he had appeared on the night of the "meeting."

"It don't make any difference. You'll have to stand it, that's all. I'm not goin' to have that low-down fool in *my* house," was Mrs. Harbaugh's parting shot. The result was that Crawley was not invited—he had not expected to be—and Harbaugh felt obliged to "dodge" him carefully for the next two or three months.

The "Harbaugh oyster supper" was the talk of an expectant community for a full and busy week. Justine Sherrod apparently was the only person in the whole neighborhood who did not know the inside facts concerning the affair. Generally, it was said to be a "mighty nice thing in the Harbaughs," but every one interested knew that the influence of Eugene Crawley prompted the good intentions.

Half-heartedly, the unconscious guest of honor prepared for the event. Her ever-neat though well-worn garments were gone over carefully, not to her satisfaction but to the delight of Mrs. Crane. Mr. and Mrs. Grimes stopped for her on their way over to Harbaugh's on the night of the

party. Trim and straight and graceful in the old black dress that looked new, Justine sat beside the fluttering Mrs. Grimes on the "back seat" of the "canopy top." There was a warm flush in her cheek, a half-defiant gleam in her eyes. She went to the party with the feeling in her breast that every woman there would "tear the old black dress to shreds" and in secret poke fun at her poverty. Crawley stood in the barn-door as she drove away with the Grimeses. There was something bitterly triumphant in the slow smile that uncovered the gleaming teeth as he waved a farewell to her—not to Mrs. Grimes, who was responding so eagerly.

"I'd like to be there,—just to see how much purtier she looks than the rest," he murmured, wistfully, as he turned away to finish the evening's chores.

Despite her illness, suffering, and never-ceasing longing for Jud, she was by far the prettiest woman in the motley crowd. The men unhesitatingly commented on her "good looks," and not one of them seemed to notice that her dress was old and simple. Many a woman went home that night envious and jealous of Justine's appealing beauty. Hard as they felt toward her, they were compelled to admit that she was "quality." She was a Van—were she ever so poor.

She was young. The heartiness with which she was received, the gaiety into which she was almost dragged, beat down the shyness that marred her first half-hour. Pride retreated before good spirits, and, to her own surprise, she came to enjoy the festivities of the night.

Glenville supported one newspaper—a weekly. Its editor and publisher and general reporter was a big man in the community. He was a much bigger man than his paper. Few people in Clay township did not know the indefatigable and ubiquitous Roscoe Boswell, either personally or by reputation. His *Weekly Tomahawk,* made up largely of "boiler-plate matter" and advertisements in wonderful typography, adorned the pantry-shelves of almost every house in the township. Jim Hardesty once ironically remarked that he believed more housewives read the paper in the pantry than they did in the parlor. For his own part, he frequently caught himself spelling out the news as he "wrapped up bacon and side-meat" with sections of the *Tomahawk.* But Mr. Boswell was a big man politically and socially. His "local and personal" column and his "country correspondence" column were alive with the gossip of the district. If 'Squire Higgins painted his barn, the "news" came out in the *Tomahawk;* if Miss Phœbe Baker

crossed the street to visit Mrs. Matlock the fact was published to the world—or, at least, to that part of it bounded by the Clay township lines; if our old friend and subscriber George Baughnacht drove out into the country with his new "side-bar" buggy the whole community was given to understand that it "looked suspicious" and that a "black-haired girl was fond of bnggy-riding."

Mrs. Harbaugh's party would not have been complete without the presence of Roscoe Boswell. He came with his paper-pad, his pencil and his jokes. Incidentally, Mrs. Boswell came. She described the dresses of the ladies. Every one was nice to Roscoe. The next issue of the *Tomahawk* was carefully read and preserved by the guests at the "sociable," for it contained a glowing account of the "swell affair," and it also had a complete list of names, including those of the children.

Now, Mr. Boswell, besides being a big man, was an observing person. He had seen a Chicago paper containing the news of the Wood-Sherrod wedding, but, like others, he was convinced that the groom was not the old Clay township boy. Nevertheless, he made up his mind to question Justine, when he saw her at the "sociable."

"How do you do, Mrs. Sherrod?" he greeted, just before the oysters were served. She was pass-

ing through the parlor in search of Mrs. Harbaugh.

"Why, Mr. Boswell," she said gaily. "It is quite an honor to have you with us. Is Mrs. Boswell here?"

"Yes—she'll be getting a description of your dress pretty soon," he said, glancing at the plain black. "My, but you look fine to-night," he added, observing the embarrassed look in her eyes. "Black's my favorite color. Always sets a woman off so. What do you hear from Jud?"

"He has been in Paris, Mr. Boswell, studying art, and he is very well. I heard from him a day or so ago."

Roscoe Boswell breathed a sigh of relief.

"How long will he be over there?" he asked.

"He is expected back this week. Perhaps I'll get a letter from him in a day or two."

"Say, would you mind letting me have the letter for publication?" cried Roscoe, quickly. "It would make great reading for his friends here. He's an awfully bright fellow, and his letter would be a corker. Won't you please send it up to me?"

"Oh, I'm sure it wouldn't be good reading, Mr. Boswell," cried Justine, flushing with pleasure. "They are mostly personal, you know, and would sound very silly to other people."

"I'll cut out the love part," he grinned, "and use nothing but the description of Paris or whatever he says about the old country."

"I don't believe he would like it, Mr. Boswell," said she, but in her mind she was wishing that one of his interesting letters could be given to the public. She wanted the people to know how splendidly he was doing.

"We'll risk that," said Roscoe conclusively. "He won't mind, and besides, he won't see it. He don't take the paper, you know. I haven't many subscribers in Chicago just now," he added, reflectively.

"He will come to see me just as soon as he gets back to Chicago and then I'll ask him about it," she said.

"Is he coming down soon?" asked the editor, going to his original object.

"Oh, yes. He will be down in a week or two, I am sure."

"Are you—er—do you expect to go to Chicago to live?" he asked, rather nervously for him.

"Yes—quite soon, I think. Mr. Sherrod is making arrangements to have me come up very shortly. He says he is getting a home ready for us on the North Side. Do you know much about the North Side?"

"Er—I—well, not much," murmured Roscoe Boswell, who had been in Chicago but once in his life—he had spent two days at the World's Fair. "I'm pretty much acquainted on the South Side and the East Side, though. Great old city, ain't she?"

"I have not been there since I was a small baby, but Jud says it is wonderful."

"It'll be mighty nice for you both when Jud takes you up," said he, not knowing how to proceed. He could not bring himself to ask her if she had heard of that strange similarity in names in connection with the Chicago wedding.

"It will, indeed, and I'll be so happy. Jud wants me so much, and he'll be earning enough soon to keep us both very nicely," she said, simply. Roscoe Boswell not only believed in the integrity of Jud Sherrod as she went away smiling, but he swore to himself that the stories about her and 'Gene Crawley were "infernal lies."

He saw her from time to time in the course of the evening, and she seemed so blithe and happy that he knew there was no shadow in her young heart.

"I'm glad of it," he mused, forgetting to respond to Mrs. Harbaugh's question. "It would have been a thundering good story for the *Tomahawk* if it had been our Jud, old as the story is by

this time, but I'm darned glad there's nothing in it." Then aloud, with a jerk: "What's that, Mrs. Harbaugh?"

Nevertheless, he could not help saying to Parson Marks, just before the party came to an end:

"Mrs. Sherrod is having the time of her young life, ain't she? She's a mighty pretty thing. Jud ought to be mighty proud of her. Every man here's half or dead in love with her."

"We all admire her very much," said Mr. Marks, with great dignity. He did not like the free and easy speech of the editor.

"I noticed a curious thing in a Chicago paper not long ago," said Boswell, whose eyes were following the girl. "Fellow with the same name as Jud's was married up there. Funny, wasn't it?"

"Not at all, Mr. Boswell," said Mr. Marks, stiffly. "There are hundreds of Sherrods in Chicago; the name is a common one. I saw the same article, I presume. It so impressed me, I confess, that I took the liberty of writing to Jud Sherrod to inquire if he knew anything about it."

"You did?" cried the editor, his eyes snapping eagerly. "And did he answer?"

"He did, most assuredly."

"Well?" asked Boswell, as the pastor paused. "What did he say?"

"He said that he knew nothing about it except what he had seen in the papers, that's all."

"That's just what I thought," said the editor, emphatically. "I knew it wasn't our Jud."

"How could it be our Jud? He has a wife," said the minister, severely.

"Well, such things do happen, parson," said Boswell, somewhat defiantly. "You hear of them every day; papers are full of them."

"You may rest assured that Jud Sherrod is not that sort of a boy. I married him and Justine Van, and I know them both," said Mr. Marks, with final scorn, and went away.

"These darn-fool preachers think they know everything," muttered Boswell.

When the Grimeses set Justine down at her gate just before midnight, 'Gene Crawley, who stood unseen in the shadow of the lilac bush, waited breathlessly for the sign that might tell him how she had fared among the Philistines.

All the evening he had been anxious. He could not put away the fear that she might be mistreated or slighted in some way up at Harbaugh's. But his heart jumped with joy when he heard her voice.

"Good-night," called Justine, as she sprang lightly to the ground. "I've had such a good time,

Mrs. Grimes. And it was good of you to take me over with you."

There was no mistaking the ring in her voice. Crawley's deep breath of relief seemed to himself almost audible.

"I thought you was having a right good time, Justine," said Martin Grimes, with a laugh. "You cut in pretty free."

"Well, it was an awfully nice party," said Mrs. Grimes. "Everybody seemed to enjoy it."

"I'm so glad I went. Thank you, ever so much," Justine said, and there was a song in her voice.

Her step was light and full of life as she sped up the path to the door of the cottage.

"Thank the Lord," thought 'Gene, as he strode off into the night, "I guess it was all right for her, after all. She's been happy to-night."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE COMING IN THE NIGHT.

SOON after their return to Chicago, Celeste began to observe changes in her husband's manner. He gave up newspaper illustrating and went in for water colors and began to take lessons in oil painting. The cleverness of Jud Sherrod, the boy, was not wanting in the man. In a short time the born artist in him was mastering the difficulties of color and he was painting in a manner that surprised not only his critical friends but himself. He toiled hard and faithfully; his little studio on the top floor of their home was always a place of activity.

Feverishly he began these first attempts at coloring, Celeste his only critic. With loving yet honest eyes she saw the faults, the virtues and the improvement. He worked day and night, despite her expostulations. The bright eyes he turned to her when he took them from the canvas were not the gray, hungry ones that dulled into reverie when he was alone with his pigments. His eyes saw two dancing faces in the colors as he spread them: one

dark, distressed, and weary, the other fair, bright, and happy.

There came to him a powerful desire to see Justine, but with it the fear that he could not leave her if he again felt her presence touching his. For an hour at a time, day after day, he would hold Celeste in his arms, uttering no word, stroking her hair, caressing her face, gloomily repentant. The enormity of his mistake—he would not call it crime—had come full upon him. It was not that he had broken the laws of the land, but that he had deceived—deceived.

Men about town remarked the change and wondered. Douglass Converse, in anxiety, sought to ascertain the cause, fearing to find Celeste unhappy. She was, beyond doubt, blissfully happy, and he fell back upon the old solution: Sherrod was not well. The latter, in response to blunt questioning, told him he was not sick, not tired, not worried, but his heart quaked with the discovery that the eyes of his friends were upon him and always questioning.

"Dudley, dear, let us go to Florida next month," said Celeste one night as they drove home from the theatre. He had drooped moodily through the play and had been silent as they whirled along in the carriage. In casting about for the cause of his apparent weariness, she ascribed it to overwork.

"Do you really want to go, Celeste?" he asked, tenderly. "Will the stay down there do you good?"

"I want to get away from Chicago for awhile. I want to be where it is bright and warm. Why should we stay here through all this wretched winter when it is so easy to go to such a delightful place? You must finish your picture in time to start next month. You don't know how happy it will make me."

If he could only take Justine with them! That longing swelled his heart almost to the bursting. "If Justine could only enjoy it all with me," he groaned to himself. "If she could go! If she could go where it is warm and bright! If I could have them both with me there could be no more darkness, no more chill, no more unhappiness."

As the days dragged along, nearer and nearer the date set for the departure for Florida, he grew moodier, more dejected. But one thought filled his mind, the abandonment of Justine; not regret for the wrong he was doing Celeste, but remorse for the wrong he was doing Justine. Sleepless nights found him seeing her slaving, half-frozen, on that wretched farm, far from the bright world he had enjoyed and she would have enjoyed.

At last, a week before the day set for their de-

parture for Florida he reached a sudden determination. He would see Justine, he would go to her in the night and kiss her and take her up in his arms and bear her to Chicago with him, there to—but no! He could not do that! He could only kiss her and take her in his arms and then steal back to the other one, a dastard. There could be but one and it was for him to choose between them.

He wondered if he could go back to the farm and live, if he could give up all he had won, if he could confess his error to Justine, if he could desert Celeste, if he could live without both of them. Selfishness told him to relinquish Justine, honor told him to strip the shackles from Celeste, even though the action broke her heart.

Then there came to his heart the design of the coward, and he could not get away from its horrible influence. It battled down manly resistance, it overthrew every courageous impulse, it made of him a weak, forceless, unresisting slave. With the fever of this malignant impulse in his blood, he stealthily began the laying of plans that were to end his troubles. But one person would be left to suffer and to wonder and she might never know the truth.

One dark night there descended from the railway coach at Glenville, a roughly clad man whose

appearance was that of a stranger but whose actions were those of one familiar with the dark surroundings. There had been few changes in Glenville since the day on which Jud Sherrod left the place for the big city on the lake, but there had been a wondrous change in the man who was returning, under cover of night, to the quaint, old-fashioned home of his boyhood. He had gone away an eager, buoyant youth, strong and ambitious; he was coming back a heartsick, miserable old man, skulking and crafty.

Through unused lanes, across dark, almost forgotten fields, frozen and bleak, he sped, his straining eyes bent upon the blackness ahead, fearfully searching for the first faint flicker in a certain window. He did not know how long it took him to cover the miles that lay between the village and the forlorn cottage in the winter-swept lane. He had carefully concealed his face from the station men and there were so few people abroad in that freezing night that no one knew of the return of Justine's long-absent husband. His journey across the fields was accomplished almost before he knew it had begun, so full was his mind of the purpose that brought him there. Every sound startled and unnerved him, yet he hurried on unswervingly. He was going to the end of it all.

At last he came to the fence that separated Justine's little farm from the broad acres of David Strong. Scarce half a mile away stood the cottage, hidden in the night. He knew it was there, and he knew that a light shone from a window on the side of the house farthest from him. It was there that she loved to sit, and, as it was not yet ten o'clock, she could not have gone to bed. He swerved to the south, and by a wide detour came to the garden fence that he had built in the days gone by. As he slunk past the corner of the barn his gaze fell upon the lighted window.

He clung to the fence and gazed intently at the square blotch of yellow in the blackness. She was there! In that room! His Justine! For a moment his resolution wavered. Then he doggedly turned his back upon the kindly glimmer in her window, and looked into the shadow. He did not dare look again upon the loving light that stretched its warmth out to him as he shuddered and cringed on the threshold of his own home, almost within the clasp of those adoring arms.

But, with his back to her, his face to the darkness, he waited, waited, waited. It seemed to him that hours passed before he dared again to face the house, fearing that another glimpse of her light would break his resolution. His mind was a blank

save for one tense thought—the one great thought that had drawn him from one woman to the other. He thought only of the moment when the light in the window should disappear, when stillness should be in Justine's bed-chamber, when no accusing eye could look upon what was to follow. His numb fingers felt for the knife that lay sheathed in his overcoat pocket, and he shuddered as they touched it.

His eyes again turned apprehensively toward the house. The window was dark; he could see nothing except the dense outlines of the square little building against the black sky. There was a dead chill in the air. The silence weighed upon him. He made a stealthy way to the weather boards of the house. The touch of his numb fingers against the frosty wood was uncanny, and he drew his hand sharply away. For a moment he paused, and his crouching form straightened with a sudden consciousness of its position. The deepest revulsion swept over him, the most inordinate shame and horror. Why was he coming to her in the dead of night, like an assassin, sneaking, cringing, shivering? With a groan he recklessly strode forward to the dark window frame. His fingers touched the glass of two or three panes, then the rags that kept the wind out of others. In there she was lying

asleep, alone, breathing softly, dreaming of him perhaps. He was within ten feet of that dear, unconscious body and she was sweetly alive—a tender breathing thing that loved him better than life. Alive, and he had come to take life away from her!

He had come to steal the only thing that was left to her—her life.

With wild eyes he sought to penetrate the darkness beyond the glass. As plainly as if it were broad daylight his imagination revealed to him the interior of the bare room. There were his drawings on the walls; the worn ingrain carpet of green and red; the old rocking-chair and the two cane-bottom chairs; the walnut stand with its simple cover of white muslin, the prayer-book and the kerosene lamp; Justine's little work-basket with its yarn, its knitting, its thread, thimble, patch-pieces and the scissors. Across the back of a chair hung her pitifully unfashionable dress of calico, her white underskirt, her thick petticoat; beside the bed stood the heavy, well-worn shoes with her black stockings lying limp and lifeless across them. The white coverlet, rumpled and ridged by the lithe figure that snuggled underneath; the brown hair, the sweet, tired face with its closed eyes, sunk in the broad pillow; the gentle breathing, the regular movement of the covers that stretched across the

warm, slumbering body; the brown, strong hand that wore his ring resting beside the cheek of the sleeper. A sudden eagerness to clasp the hand, to hold it firm, to protect it from something, came to him. He wondered for a moment why she should need protection—before he remembered.

How could he live without her? The folly of trying to do so! Better, far better, that he should die and take her with him, leaving the other to wonder and at last find her young way back to happiness through forgetfulness. Foresworn to end his own misery and to destroy every possible chance that might convey his faithlessness to the trusting Justine, he had slunk away from the city, bidding farewell to the world that had weakened him, and was now clinging to her window sill with love and murder in his heart. He had come to kill her and to kill himself. He must have it over. There was no other way. His legs trembled as he sped on to the kitchen door. The door was bolted and he sought the narrow window. It moved under his effort, creaking treacherously, but he did not pause. A half-dead fire smoldered in the kitchen stove—their kitchen stove—and he sank beside it, craving its friendly warmth. He crouched there for many minutes, steeling himself for what was to come. Indecision and weakness assailed him again and

again, but he overcame them; the fear of death made him cast glances over his shoulder, but he set his teeth; the terror of crime shook him, but he fought it away. There was but one way to end the tragedy, there was but one way to save Justine. It would be over in a moment; there was relief in that.

How he crept through the kitchen and the dark sitting-room he did not know, but at last he found himself, breathless and pulseless, at her door. Then came the stunning thought: was she alone in the room? Was old Mrs. Crane with her or was she in the little half-story room at the head of the stairs? He shrank back to the kitchen noiselessly. Groping his way to the table he ran his hand over its surface until it touched the candlestick that he knew was there as well as if he had seen it. He lighted the candle from the flickering blue flame in the stove, and, shading it with his hand, glided swiftly to her door.

After what seemed an hour of irresolution, he softly pressed the latch. The almost imperceptible noise sounded like a crash of thunder in his sensitive ears, but the door swung slowly open and he stood in his wife's room. Yes! There was the bed and there was the mass of brown hair and the white, blurred face and——

But, what was that noise? His heart stopped beating—his wide eyes saw Justine's hand slowly stretch out and, as if its owner were acting in her sleep, apparently tuck in the covers on the side of the bed nearest the wall. A faint, smothered wail came to his ears. There was no mistaking the sound.

A baby!

As he stood there in the doorway, frozen to the spot, the candle in one hand, the knife in the other, Justine moved suddenly and in a moment was staring at him with wide, terrified eyes.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FIRST-BORN.

SLOWLY she half raised herself from the pillow, her right arm going out as if to shield the tiny bit of life beside her, her great eyes staring at the intruder; the inclination to shriek was met by the paralysis of every faculty and she could do no more than moan once in her fear. The eyes of the tall, gaunt man, upon whose face the fitful light of the candle threw weird shadows, held her motionless.

"Wha—what do you want?" she finally whispered.

"Justine, don't you—don't you know me?" he asked, hoarsely, not conscious of the question, motionless in the doorway.

"Oh, oh," she moaned, tremulously, and then her hand was stretched toward him, wonder, uncertainty, fear in her eyes.

"I am Jud—Jud; don't you know me? Don't be frightened," he went on, mechanically.

"It is a dream—oh, it is a dream," she whispered.

"No, no! I thought you were asleep. Don't

look at me, Justine, don't look at me! Oh God, I cannot do it—I cannot!" He fell back against the wall. The knife clattered to the floor. Half convinced, now that she was thoroughly awake, Justine pressed her hand to her eyes, and then, suddenly with a glad cry, threw back the bed covers and sprang to the floor.

"Don't come near me," he cried, drawing back. She paused in amazement.

"What is it, Jud—what is it?" she cried. "Why are you here? What has happened?" The candle dropped from his nerveless fingers.

"Justine!" he groaned, stricken with terror in the darkness. An instant later he felt her warm arms about him and her trembling voice was pleading with him to tell her what had happened. He was next conscious of lying back in the old rocker, listlessly watching her relight the candle. It was freezing cold in the room. His lips and cheeks were warm where she had kissed them. And he had thought to touch her dear, loving lips only after they were cold in the death he was bringing.

"Tell me, Jud, dear Jud," she cried, dropping to her knees beside him, her hands clutching his shoulders. Even in the dim, uncertain light he could see how thin and wan she had grown—he could see the suffering of months. A muffled wail

came from the bed and her face turned instantly in that direction. His hand fell heavily upon hers.

"Whose child is that?" he demanded, harshly. She looked up into his face with a quick, startled glance, the bewildered expression in her eyes slowly giving way to one of pain.

"Why, Jud!" she cried, shrinking back. Her honest brown eyes searched his face.

"Is it mine?" he asked, blind with suspicion.

"How could it be any one's but—Oh, Jud Sherrod! Do you mean that—that—you don't think he is—my husband, do you think that of me?" she whispered, slowly shrinking away from him.

"I—I—you did not tell me," he muttered, dazed and bewildered. "How was I to know?"

"Oh, I have loved you so long and so truly," she faltered. A sob of shame and anguish choked her as she arose and turned dizzily toward the bed. She threw herself face downward upon it, her arms across the sleeping babe, and burst out into weeping.

Startled into sanity by the violence of her grief he cast himself on his knees beside the bed.

"I was mad, crazy, Justine," he cried. She shuddered as his hands and arms touched her. "Oh, God!" he groaned. "My wife, my girl, don't

shrink from me like that. I did not mean it, I did not know what I was saying. Look up, Justine, my Justine!" He seized her hand and covered it with kisses. At first she struggled to withdraw it; then suddenly abandoned it to him. Presently she pressed it against his lips, and then in an instant her face was turned toward him, the cheeks wet, the eyes swimming.

"Oh, Jud, you did not think it, I know you didn't," she choked out, and sobbed again as he lifted and clasped her to his breast. In that moment he forgot his dreadful mission, forgot the baby and the misery of everything, and she was happier than she had been in months. Once more the tender and thoughtful Jud, he drew the covers over her shivering body and tucked them in, while she smiled happily up into his wan face.

"Don't you want to see the baby, dear?" she asked, timidly, after a long time. He had seated himself on the side of the bed, his coat collar turned up about his chilled throat, his red hands clasped under his arms. "He is three months old, Jud, and you never knew. It is so strange you did not receive my letter. I could not write, though, for many weeks, I was so weak. Oh, Jud, you don't know how much I have suffered."

It was the first complaint she had ever expressed

to him in all those weary, despairing months of loneliness and privation, and he covered his face with his hands. She drew them gently away, so that he might look at the baby. It was with a feeling of shame that he first saw his child. Young as it was, it bore the features of its father; there could be no doubt. He gazed upon the little face and the clenched fists, and a deep reverence came to him. Pity for the baby, the mother and himself overcame him and he dropped his head upon Justine's shoulder.

"Justine, forgive me, forgive me," he sobbed.

"There is nothing to forgive, dear. Don't cry," she said, softly. "It will all come right some day and we'll be so proud of the boy. Isn't he strong? Just feel of his little arms. And isn't he just like you? I hope he will grow up to be as good and as strong as you, Jud." He looked dumbly into her eyes, still dewy with tears, and dropped his own, lest she should see the deceit in them. But she was not looking for deceit.

"You are so cold, dear," she went on, "and you look so ill and tired. Come to bed and let me get up and make some hot coffee for you. Why, Jud, it is past midnight, and it is bitterly cold outside. How did you come from Glenville?"

"I walked," he answered, wearily.

"Walked?" she cried. "Why, Jud, what is wrong? Why are you here? Has anything happened to you?" Her voice was sharp with dread.

"I am the most wretched man in the world, Justine."

"Tell me all about it, Jud; let me help you. Don't look like that! It must be all right, dear, now that we are together. All three, Jud," she went on, cheerily. "I would not even name him before you came, but I want you to call him Dudley." He felt the loving arms tighten about his neck, and there came the eager desire to confess everything and to beg her to hide from the world with him in some place where he could never be found out. The love for Celeste was deep, but it was not like this love for Justine. He must keep it. The other might go; he and Justine and the baby would go away together. But not yet. Justine must not know, after all—at least not yet.

"Everything has gone wrong, dear, and I had nothing to live for," he began, wearily; and then with a skill that surprised him he rushed through with a story that drew the deepest pity from his listener and gave him a breathing spell in which to develop a plan for the future.

"You will loathe and despise me, Justine, but I couldn't bear the thought of going into the here-

after without you," he said, after he had confessed his object in coming. "I had failed in everything and life wasn't worth living. My position is gone, I have no money and I don't seem to be able to find work. You were everything in the world to me and you were so proud of me. I just couldn't come back here and tell you that I had failed after all the chances I have had. When I opened your door to-night I had that knife in my hand. Do not be afraid, dearest; it is all over and we'll live to be happy yet. God help me, I was going to kill you while you slept, kiss you to prove to your departing soul that I loved you and that it was not hate that inspired the deed, and then, the blade, wet with your dear blood, was to find its way to my heart. Thank God, you awoke. Had it not been for that we would be lying here dead, and our boy, hidden in the bed, would have escaped my hand only to be thrown upon the world, a helpless orphan. But God has helped me to-night and He will not again forget me. With His help and your love, I will go forth again with new courage and I'll win my way."

She shuddered and thanked God alternately during his story, and when he paused after the firm declaration to win his way, she cried:

"You have been brave so long and I have been

brave, too, Jud. Why should we give up the fight? I have hardly enough to eat in the house, and I have endured more than seemed just from our loving God, but I did not forget that I have you and you are everything. It has been hard, terribly hard, but I did not give up."

Then she confessed her secret, timorously at first, then eagerly, pleadingly. She told him of 'Gene Crawley's reformation, his kindness, his real nobility, expecting at the outset that Jud would be angry and displeased. But he was thinking of the future, not of the past or the present. After a moment or two of surprise and chagrin, he accepted her course in regard to Crawley as a natural condition, and, trusting her implicitly, found no fault with her action. He went so far as to credit Crawley with more manhood than he had suspected. A flood of joy enveloped her when she saw that he was reconciled; the weight of her only deception was lifted from her troubled heart.

Already he was thinking of the ordeal ahead of him: the return to Celeste, the confession of his duplicity, his plea for forgiveness and leniency, and then the life of peace and solitude with Justine and the boy. He knew that Celeste's heart would be crushed, but it was the only way back to the path of honor. Justine should never know of his mar-

riage to Celeste; that was the one thing the honest, virtuous country girl would not forgive. He even found himself, as he always was in emergencies, impatient to have the ordeal over, to know his fate, to give torture to one that he might be happy with the other. With the arms of the real wife about his neck, he trembled with the desire to be off to the side of the deceived one, there to unmask himself, to grovel at her feet and then to fly from the world. How he could face Celeste he knew not, but he must do it. There seemed no way to lighten the blow he must deal and there seemed no escape from it. He was a bigamist, a criminal.

To leave her without an explanation would result in a tireless search, inspired by her love; the discovery of his duplicity by the police would mean conviction; even Celeste could not save him. Shrewdly he brought himself to believe that, though she could not forgive him, she would release him to avoid a scandal. He knew that he must play out to the end his rôle of the coward and the supplicant and the liar.

It was only after the most persistent pleading that Justine induced him to remain with her through the night and the day following. She promised to keep his visit a secret, respecting his show of humiliation, and she vouched for the

silence of Mrs. Crane who slept upstairs. And so the would-be murderer and suicide slept and dreamed and plotted for twenty-four hours in the house of his victim, slinking away on the night after, with her kisses on his lips, her voice in his ears, leaving behind brave promises and the vow to come back to her and the boy without murder in his heart.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TALE OF TEARS.

HE HAD told Celeste that he would be away from home over one night, and she was alarmed when he did not return on the second night after his departure. On the third day she could not shut out the picture of his despondent face. When she heard his footsteps in the lower hall that afternoon her heart gave a great bound of relief, and all his plans went scattering before her joyous greeting.

He entered the house steeled to tell her, but his resolution wavered, and, with the words on his tongue's end, he felt them forced back by her kisses. He let himself procrastinate; every vestige of courage vanished before this attack of love and confidence. If his response to her welcome was lifeless and cold, she did not complain; if he seemed distraught, she overlooked it in the joy of having her apprehensions swept away.

"Do you know, dear, I was beginning to fear you had been lost in the snow storm and that I should have to send St. Bernard dogs out to find you?" she said, gaily, as she drew him into the big

chair before the grate and climbed cozily upon the arm beside him.

"I can't tell her now," he was groaning to himself. "I can't break her heart to-day—not to-day."

"Was it so warm and pleasant in Milwaukee that you couldn't tear yourself away?" she went on, her hand caressing his hair.

"Where? Mil—Oh, yes, Milwaukee," he stammered, recalling that he had told her he was going there on business. "No; it was beastly. I had to stay a day longer than I expected."

"Tell me all about it," she said. "Did everything turn out as good as you hoped? Will he take the pictures?"

He was unable to reply at once. Indeed, it was necessary for him to remember just what excuse he had given her for going to Milwaukee. Slowly it came back to him. Without lifting his guilty eyes from the coals, he told her that Mr. Evans had not given him the order for the five paintings until he had consulted his partner, who was delayed in returning from St. Paul. On the partner's return (here Jud's twisted heart leaped at a fresh inspiration) the firm promptly agreed to accept all of his paintings and contracted for others to be finished within a very short space of time.

"Isn't that a very short time in which to do the work, Jud?" she inquired, anxiously. A cunning thought had prompted his statement; in it he saw the respite that might be needed. The task of supplying the fictitious order would command his closest thought and energy, and, by preventing the trip to Florida, would give him a longer time in which to make ready for the trial at hand. He saw that he would lack the immediate courage to tell her, and that it would require hours and days of torture to bring him to the task.

"It means that I'll have to give up the Florida trip," he said.

"O, no, Jud! Let the old pictures go! Can't they wait? You must go to Florida. It will do you so much good, and my heart is so set on it."

A new thought struck him sharply and his spirits leaped upward. "You could go without me, Celeste. There's no reason why you should give up the pleasure because I have to——"

"Dudley Sherrod," she interrupted, decisively, "you are hateful. I will not go a step without you. It is you who need the rest and the change. Write to Mr. Evans this afternoon and tell him you cannot do the pictures until next spring."

"I can't do that, dear. They must be done at once," he said.

"But you must have the two months in Florida," she persisted in troubled tones. "Why, dear, I have made preparations to leave on Saturday and this is Thursday. Won't you, please, for my sake, give up the pictures?"

"Impossible," he said, firmly, rising suddenly. He pressed her hand softly and passed from the room, afraid to look back into her eyes. She sat perfectly still for many minutes, the puzzled expression deepening in her eyes.

"To-morrow I will tell her all," he vowed, as he paced the floor of his studio. The memory of the distressed look in her eyes bore him down. He knew that he could not endure the sight of prolonged pain in those loving eyes, and what little wisdom he had at his command told him that to end the suspense quickly was the most charitable thing to do. "To-morrow, to-morrow," he repeated, feverishly. He groaned aloud with loathing for himself and shame of what the morrow was to bring. "I love her. How can I tell her that she is not my wife? How can I tell her that I deceived her deliberately? And what will she say, what will she do? Good God, what is to be the end of it? Will she submit or will she cry for the vengeance that is justly hers?"

For the first time the agony of this question was

beyond his power of suffering. His mind refused to consider it. He was dulled; he felt nothing—and presently there was a relief in feeling nothing. Up to that time his sensitive nature had responded to every grief. Of a sudden his mind refused grief; and the inspiration came to him to support that refusal. He shut out thoughts of Celeste, and let himself look forward to the happiness with Justine and his boy.

The next day he faltered in his determination to tell Celeste, and the day after it was the same. He could not stand before her and look into her eyes and tell her. He was conscious of the fact that her troubled gaze was following him wherever he moved, that she seemed to be reading his thoughts. He grew more apathetic under the scrutiny. He took to good food as a refuge from his thoughts, and surprised her by asking for dainty dishes. He found some poetry, careless with fatalism, and instantly became a fatalist. He would let affairs take their course. The yearning for Justine dulled a little.

But one day, entering his studio, expecting to find him at work, she was amazed to see him with a picture in his hand. He was looking at it eagerly. She could see the face. It was Justine Van.

Justine Van! The girl of the meadow; the

sweetheart of the old days! The first jealousy tore at her heart and she began vaguely to comprehend the stoop in his shoulders.

He had found the picture among some old drawings, and the sight of it enlivened his desire for Justine. He wrote her a letter, and then conceived the plan of writing a confession to Celeste, and slinking off to his room to await the crash. He knew she would fly to him and—well, it would be like defending himself against an assault. He laughed harshly at himself as he contemplated this last exhibition of cowardice. He wrote not only one but ten confessions, destroying one after the other as the lingering spark of manhood flared up in resistance to this mode of doing battle.

One night Celeste came to him in the dimly lighted studio. The trouble in her heart revealed itself in her voice and eyes. He sat dreaming before the little grate and started when her hands gently touched his cheeks from behind.

"What is the matter, Jud, dear?" she asked, softly. "There is something on your mind. Won't you confide in me? I love you, dear. Tell me everything, Jud, and don't try to bear it alone. Don't you think I love you enough to share the greatest pain that might come to you?"

He tried to speak, but could only reach up and clasp her hands in his.

"Can you guess, Jud, of whom I was thinking to-day?" she went on bravely.

"I—I can't guess," he said, with misgiving in his soul.

"I was thinking of Justine Van, that pretty girl down in the country. Her face was as clear as if it were before me in reality. Do you know, Jud, I shall always see her as she appeared on that day at Proctor's Falls. She was so pretty and you were so handsome. I thought you were sweethearts, you remember. How embarrassed you were, both of you, when I so foolishly told you that the money I paid for the picture was to be her wedding present. I believe I began to love you on that very day."

Her hands were still pressing his cheeks and her heart suddenly stood still and grew icy cold when something hot and wet trickled over the fingers. Without a word she drew away from him, and when he looked up through the mist of tears, she was passing from the room, straight and still.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE NIGHT OUT.

THE next morning she telephoned to Douglass Converse. In response to her somewhat exacting request, he presented himself at the Sherrod home in the late afternoon. Her manner had impressed him with the fear that something had gone wrong in the little household. They were still the best of friends and he was a frequent, informal visitor. Jud admired him immensely—no one could help liking this tall, good-looking, boyish fellow. In the old days Celeste had known his love for her, but after her marriage there had been no evidence, by word or deed, that she still lived uppermost in his affections. To Douglass Converse, she was the wife of his best friend.

He had seen, with increasing alarm, the change in Jud's manner and appearance. The anxious look in Celeste's eyes was but poorly concealed of late; he feared that all was not well with them. There was no mistaking Jud's attitude toward the world and the genial friends of old. The newspaper men who had been his boon companions a

few months before now saw nothing of him. He and Celeste rarely were seen in society, seldom at the theatres and cafés; it was as though they had dropped entirely away from the circle which had known them so well. The excuse that he was busy in his studio was sufficient until even outsiders began to see the change in him. It was impossible to hide the haggardness in his face.

Converse, sitting opposite Celeste in the drawing-room, saw depression under the brave show of cheerfulness in her face. His mind was filled with the possibilities of the moment. Over the telephone she had said that she wanted to see him on a matter of considerable importance. His first unuttered query on entering the hall was: Where is Sherrod? He had expected a greeting from him on the moment of his arrival. Before the short visit was over, Converse was plying himself with scores of silent and unanswerable questions.

"Where is Jud?" he asked, after the first commonplaces.

"At work in the studio," she replied. He noticed the change of tone, but tried to look uninterested.

"He's working a trifle hard these days, isn't he?" he asked, casually. Somehow, he felt relieved on hearing that Jud was at work. He discovered

that he had feared—something, he could not define.

"What is he doing, Celeste?"

"Something for the Milwaukee people I was telling you about not long ago. They insist on having the paintings before the first of February."

"Before February? Why, that's—" But he checked the exhibition of surprise and went on with admirable enthusiasm—"That's a surprisingly nice order. It proves that he has made a hit and that the market for his work is immediate."

"But he is working too hard, Douglass," she cried, unreservedly. The look in his eyes changed instantly.

"I was afraid so," he said. Then, eager to dispel any feeling of hesitancy she might have, he broke out, bluntly: "You are very much disturbed about him, aren't you, Celeste? I know you are, but I think you should find some comfort in knowing that the work will soon be completed and you can both run away for a good rest."

"I can't help being worried," she said, in low tones, as though fearing her words might reach Jud's ear in the distant studio. "Douglass, I want to talk with you about Jud. You will understand, won't you? I wouldn't have asked you to come if

it were not that I am very much distressed and need the advice and help of some one."

"Isn't it possible that you are needlessly alarmed?" he asked, earnestly. "I'm sure it can be nothing serious. You will laugh at your fears some day."

"I hope you are right. But it doesn't cheer me a bit to talk like that, Douglass. I am not deceiving myself. He is changed, oh, so greatly changed," she cried.

"You—you don't mean to say his—his love—" began Converse. "There—there isn't any danger of—of *that?*" he substituted.

"No, no! You don't understand me," she said, drearily. "He loves me as much as ever—I know he does. It isn't that. Douglass, we must get his mind off his work. He thinks of—of nothing else." She would have given anything for the courage to tell him what she had seen the day before. Her confidence in this tall friend was sufficient, but she could not acknowledge the pain and terror Jud's tears had brought to her.

"Well, it can't be for long. The work will soon be completed," urged he, knowing as he spoke how futile his words were.

"But it makes me so unhappy," she cried, with a woman's logic.

"Poor girl," he smiled. "Let the poor chap work in peace. It will come out all right. I know him. He's ambitious, indefatigable, eager. His soul is in this work. Just now he is winning his spurs in a new line, and his mind, his heart is full of it. Can't you see it all? Put yourself in his place, with his fine temperament, and see how intensely interested you would be. You would be just as much wrapped up in it as he—just as much enraptured, I might say. Brace up, dear girl; Jud can't help but turn out all right. He's bound to win."

"The trouble is—the trouble is—" She hesitated so long, staring with wide eyes at the grate fire, that he feared she would not continue—"His heart doesn't seem to be in the work at all."

"You mean——?"

"I mean, Douglass, that it is not ambition that inspires him just now. There is something on his mind—something else. Oh, I don't know what it can be, but it is unmistakable. He is not the same—not the same in anything except his love for me."

Converse was silent for a long time, his eyes on her pale face, his mind busy with conjecture.

"I am glad to hear you say that, Celeste," he said at last, a deep sigh escaping involuntarily.

"He works feverishly," she went on, as though he had not spoken. "Of course, he is doing the work well. He never did anything badly. But I know he is positively driving himself, Douglass. There isn't anything like the old inspiration, nothing like the old love for the work."

"I see it all," he said, relief in his voice. "His heart is not in the work, simply because he is doing it for some one else and not for himself. They told him what they wanted and he is simply breaking his neck, Celeste, to get the job off his hands."

"But, listen to me, Douglass," she cried, in despair. "He told me they wanted five pictures—a series of studies from life. The series was to represent five periods in the life of a woman, beginning with childhood and ending in extreme old age. But, Douglass, dear, he is painting landscapes instead."

Converse bit his lip.

"You must have misunderstood him," he managed to say. She shook her head sadly.

"No; he was most precise in explaining the conditions to me the day after his return from Milwaukee. I remember that I was very much interested. The work, you know, upset our plan for going to Florida, and I was quite resentful at first. You can imagine my astonishment when I found

that he was doing landscapes and not the figures the order calls for."

Converse was dumb in the face of this indisputable evidence. He could muster up no way to relieve her fears. There could be no reassuring her after what she had seen and he wisely forebore.

"It was very strange," he said, finally. "He must have a reason for the change, and no doubt he has forgotten to speak to you about it."

"I wish I could believe that, Douglass," she sighed. "He likes you. You can help me, if you will."

"With all my heart. Anything in the world, Celeste," he cried.

"Then get him away from his work as much as possible. He won't go out anywhere, you know. I've implored him to go out with me time and again. Douglass, can't you think of some way to —to get him away from himself?"

She was standing beside him, her hand clasping his as it rested on the arm of the chair. Converse looked up into the troubled eyes.

"Tell me what to do, Celeste, and I'll try," he said, earnestly.

"Make him go out with you—go out among the men he used to know and liked so well. I'm sure he likes them still. He'd enjoy being with them,

don't you think? He seldom leaves his studio, much less the house. I want you to take him to luncheons and dinners—where the men are. It will get him out of himself, I know. Do, Douglass, do for my sake, make him forget his work. Take him back to the old life in the club, at the cafés—if only for a little while. Don't you understand?"

"You mean—oh, Celeste, you don't mean to say that he is tired of this happiness?" he cried.

"He is unhappy, I'm sure of it. He loves me, I know, but—" She could go no further.

"I know what you mean, Celeste, but you are wrong—fearfully wrong. Poor little woman! God, but you are brave to look at it as you do."

They did not hear Jud as he stopped on the stairs to look down upon them. He saw them and was still. The pain was almost unbearable. There was no jealousy in it, only remorse and pity.

"Ah, if only she belonged to him and not to me," he was thinking. "He is straight as a die, and she would never know unhappiness. He loved her, he loves her still, and she—poor darling, loves me, the basest wretch in all the world."

He closed his eyes and leaned heavily against the stairway. Its creaking attracted the attention of the two in the drawing-room. When he looked again, they were standing and staring at him.

Slowly he descended, a mechanical smile forcing itself into his face.

"Hello, Doug," he said. "I thought I heard your voice. Glad to see you."

A quick glance of apprehension passed between Converse and Celeste. Had he heard?

"I just inquired for you, Jud," said Converse, pulling himself together as quickly as possible. "Celeste says you're terribly busy. Don't overwork yourself, old man. I dropped in to say you are to go to a little dinner with me to-night. Some of the boys want to eat something for old times' sake."

The shadow that passed over Jud's face was disconcerting.

"There is nothing else in the way, Jud, dear," Celeste hastened to say. "It would be awfully jolly, I should think."

"Vogelsang says you haven't been in his place for months," added Converse, reproachfully. "You shouldn't go back on a crowd like this, old man. They'll think you're stuck up because you've made a hit."

Sherrod smiled wearily, then pulled his nerves together and made a brave show of being pleased and interested.

"I don't believe they'll accuse me of that, Doug,"

he said. "They know I'm frightfully busy. Who is to be there?"

Converse, with all his good intentions, had not been foresighted enough to see that he might be asked this natural question. It was impossible to count on any one in particular, and it would be far from politic to mention names and then be obliged to give flimsy excuses if their owners failed to appear.

"Oh, just some of the old crowd," he replied, evasively, even guiltily. Jud's gaze was on the fire in the grate and Converse was thankful for the respite. "They'll be mighty glad to see you again. It doesn't seem right to take you away from Celeste, but we're talking of doing something like this at least once a week."

"Can't you have ladies' night occasionally, as they say at the clubs?" asked Celeste, merrily entering into the spirit of the conspiracy.

"I suppose we could," said Converse, with well assumed reluctance.

"Count me out to-night, Douglass," said Jud, at this juncture. "I'll come down for the next one, but just now I'm——"

"That won't do!" exclaimed Converse, peremptorily. "Work is no excuse. There was a time when you worked a blamed sight harder than you

do now, and yet you found time to eat, drink and be merry—I should say, eat and be merry. You go with us to-night. That's all there is about it. I'm not going down and tell the fellows you couldn't come because you had to stay at home and put on a few dabs of paint that don't have to be on before to-morrow. I'll stop for you on my way down at 7:30, and I'll get him home safe and sound and sober, Celeste. Don't worry if he's out after nine o'clock."

"I shan't sleep a wink," smiled Celeste, putting her arm through Jud's and laying her cheek against his shoulder. Sherrod sighed and smiled and said he would be ready when his friend called.

Celeste went to the door with her confederate. She pressed his hand warmly and her eyes seemed to exact a promise that could not be broken.

"Do everything in your power, Douglass," she said, softly.

"He hates to leave you alone, Celeste; that's the worst obstacle to the plan," said Converse, his lips whitening. "But we'll try to make him—to—I was going to say forget, but that would be impossible. He can't forget that you are here and loving him all the time."

Then he was off, confronted by rather arduous conditions. It would be necessary to get together

a party of congenial spirits, and it was imperative that it be done in such a way that Jud's suspicion might not be aroused. When his hansom stopped for Jud at 7:30 Converse was thoroughly satisfied with the result of his expedition in search of guests, but he was conscious of a fear that the attempt to take Sherrod "out of himself" would be a failure.

A half-dozen good fellows of the old days had promised to come to Vogelsang's at eight, and, under ordinary circumstances, there was no reason why the night should not be a merry one. It all rested with Jud. Converse was gratified to find his friend in excellent spirits. His eyes were bright, his face was alive with interest. The change was so marked that Converse marveled while Celeste rejoiced.

If he had any doubts at the beginning, they were dispelled long before the night was over. Sherrod's humor was wild, unnatural. To Converse it soon became ghastly. To the others, it was merely cause for wonder and the subject for many a sly remark about the "muchly married man who finally gets a night off."

Going homeward in the hansom, Converse, now convinced that Jud's mind was disordered, asked in considerable trepidation if he really meant to dine out every evening, as he had said to the others at

the table. Sherrod's hilarity, worked up for the occasion, had subsided. He was, to the utter bewilderment of his companion, the personification of gloominess. Involuntarily Converse moved away from his side, unable to conquer the fear that the man was actually mad.

"Did I say that?" came in slow, mournful tones from the drooping figure beside him.

"Yes," was all that Converse could reply. Sherrod's chin was on his breast, his arms hanging limply to the seat.

"I don't believe I care much for that sort of thing any more," he said, slowly.

"Why, Jud, I thought you had a bully time to-night," cried Converse, in hurt tones.

Sherrod looked up instantly. After a moment's silence, his hand fell on the other's knee and there was something piteous in his voice when he spoke.

"Did you, old man? How in the world—" here he brought himself up with a jerk—"I should say, how could I help having a good time?" he cried, enthusiastically. "They are the best lot of fellows in the world. I had the time of my life."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE LETTER TO CRAWLEY.

JUSTINE waited and waited patiently. His midnight visit was the most dramatic event of her life. That he had come to kill her and then himself she was slow in realizing. As the days and nights went by, the real horror of his thought took root and grew. Sometimes she awakened in the night cold with perspiration, dreading to see the white-faced man in the doorway. In some of her dreams he stood above her, knife uplifted, his face full of unspeakable malevolence. Waking she would scream aloud and instinctively she would draw her baby close to her breast as if seeking protection from this tiny guardian.

His letter, intended to inspire confidence and hope, was not skillful enough to deceive even Justine. She could read between the lines and there she could see that he was hiding something from her. She could not help feeling that he was facing failure and that he was miserable. With every mail she expected to receive a letter from him in which he would announce that he had given up the

fight, and then would come the dispatch bearing the news that he had killed himself.

Mrs. Crane knew, of course, of Sherrod's strange visit. 'Gene Crawley saw him but once on that occasion, looking gloomily from the window. The two men did not speak to each other, although Crawley would have called a greeting to him had not the man in the window turned away abruptly as soon as he met the gaze of the one in the barnyard. The only human creature about the little farm who did not feel the oppressiveness was the baby, Dudley the second. He was a healthy, happy child, and, birth-gift of tragedy though he was, he brought sunshine to the sombre home.

One day, three weeks after Jud's visit, Justine approached 'Gene as he crossed the lot on his way to feed the stock in the sheds. A team of horses occupied stalls in the barn, but they were not Justine's. When her horses had died, 'Gene, from the savings of many months, had bought a team of his own, and his animals were doing the work on her place. The cow and the hogs and the chickens belonged to Justine—and Jud. Crawley observed an unusual pallor in her face and her eyes were dark with pain and trouble.

" 'Gene, I can't get it out of my mind that every-

thing is not going well with Jud," she said, as he came up to her.

"Wasn't he all right when he was here?" asked he, slowly. She had to hesitate for a moment before she could answer the question. She must choose her words.

"He has not been well, 'Gene," she said at last. "You know sickness is a dreadfully discouraging thing in a big place like Chicago. Nobody cares whether you get well or die, and if you get too sick to work some one else takes your place. Jud has had a lot of bad luck and I know he's sick and discouraged."

"He didn't look right well when he was here," admitted 'Gene. "I wouldn't git upset about it, 'f I was you, Justine. He'll come out all right."

"But maybe he is sick and can't do anything," she persisted. "When he was here he said he'd been out of work and in a hospital for a long time."

"Out of work?" repeated he, slowly.

"Yes," she went on, hurriedly, now that she had begun the confession, "and he is in debt, too. It costs so much money to live up there, and if one gets behind it's hard to catch up, he says. Oh, 'Gene, do you suppose anything has happened to him? I have had no letter since last Thursday

and this is Wednesday, isn't it? I know he is sick, I know it, 'Gene."

"Ain't he on the paper any more?"

"He has been off the paper for months."

"Doin' nothin'?"

"Some private work, but it hasn't paid well. And, besides, he hasn't been well. That's held him back."

"What did he say when he was here? Did he have a job in view?"

"No," she answered, shame outfacing her pride. Neither spoke for a long time. She was looking intently at the frozen ground, nervously clasping and unclasping her fingers. His black eyes were upon the white, drooping face, and his slow mind was beginning to see light. His heart began to swell with rage against the man who had won this prize and could not protect it.

With the shrewdness of the countryman, he concluded that Jud had not been able to combat the temptations of the great city. He had failed because he had fallen. He cast a slow glance at Justine. Her head was bent and her hands were clasping and unclasping. He knew what it was costing her to make confession to him and lifted his head with the joy of feeling that she had come to him for sympathy.

"Why don't he come home if he's sick?" he asked. "He could rest up down here an'—an' mebby that'd git him on his feet ag'in."

"He doesn't like to give up, that's all. You know how brave and true he is, 'Gene. It would be awful to come back here and admit that—that he couldn't get along up there. O, I wish he would come back, I wish he would come back," she wailed, breaking down completely. The tears forced themselves through the fingers that were pressed to her eyes.

"God A'mighty, how she loves him," groaned Crawley to himself. In this moment the big blasphemer of other days loved her more deeply than ever before in his dark, hopeless life. "Couldn't you—you write an' tell him to come down here fer a couple of weeks or—or a month?" he stammered, after a moment of thought.

"He wouldn't come, 'Gene, he wouldn't come," she sobbed. "He said he would not give up until he had made a home for me up there. When he came the last time he was discouraged, but—but he got over it and—and—Oh, I wish he would write to me! The suspense is killing me."

Crawley had turned his back and was leaning against the fence.

"He needs me, 'Gene," she said; "he needs me to cheer him on. I ought to be with him up there."

He started sharply and turned to her. She was looking into his eyes, and her hands were half lifted toward him.

"He is so lonely and I'm sure he is sick. I must go to him—I must. That's what I want to talk to you about. How am I to go to him? What shall I do? I can't bear it any longer. My place is with him."

"If he ain't got a job, Justine, you'll—you'll be——"

"You want to say that I'll be a burden to him, that's it, isn't it? But I'll work for him. I'll do anything. If he's sick, I'll wash and iron and sew and scrub and—oh, anything. I've been thinking about it since last night, and you must not consider me foolish when I tell you what I want to do. I want to borrow some money on the place."

"You mean you want to put a morgidge on the —on the farm?" he asked, slowly.

"How else can I get the money, 'Gene? A small mortgage won't be so bad, will it? What is the farm worth?" She was feverish with excitement.

"It's not the best of land, you know, and there ain't no improvements," he said, still more deliberately. "You might sell the place for $800, but I doubt it."

"I won't sell it; it must be kept for my boy. But I can borrow a little on it, can't I? Wouldn't David Strong let me have $200 on it?"

"Good Lord, Justine, don't put a morgidge on the place!" he cried. "That will be the end of it. It's the way it always goes. Don't do anything like that."

"There is no other way to get the money and I—I am going to Jud," she said, determinedly, and he saw the light in her eye.

In the end he promised to secure the money for her, and he did. The next day Martin Grimes loaned Eugene Crawley $150, taking a chattel mortgage on a farm wagon and harness and the two big bay horses that stood in Justine's barn. At first she refused to take the money, but his insistence prevailed, and three days later she and her boy left Glenville for Chicago and Jud. She promised to acquaint Crawley with Jud's true condition and their plans for the future.

Crawley said good-bye to her as she climbed into Harve Crose's wagon on the day of departure. He wished her luck in a harsh, unnatural tone, and abruptly turned to the barn. For hours he sat in the cold mow, disconsolate, exalted. His horses stamping below were mortgaged! Lost to him, no doubt, but he gloried in the sacrifice. He had given

his fortune to gratify her longing to be with the man she loved.

At sunset he trudged to the tollgate. An unreasoning longing filled his lonely heart. When he asked for the mail there was uppermost in his mind the hope of a letter from her, although she had been gone not more than five hours. His loneliness increased when Mrs. Hardesty said that there was no mail for him or Justine. For the first time in months he felt the old longing for drink.

"Jestine gone to Chickago fer a visit er to stay?" asked Jim Hardesty, when Crawley joined the crowd that lounged about the big sheet-iron stove in the store.

'Gene did some very quick thinking in the next few minutes. He realized that her departure had been the subject of comment and speculation, and that it would be necessary for him to resort to something he knew nothing about—diplomacy. Had he been an observing man he would have noticed the sudden cessation of talk about the stove when he first entered the toll house. The loungers had been discussing her departure, and there would have been a murderer in their midst had 'Gene Crawley heard the remark that fell from Luther Hitchcock's lips.

"Don't know how long she'll stay," responded

'Gene, briefly. He leaned against the counter, crossing his legs.

"How's Jed gittin' 'long up yander?" continued Jim.

"All right, I reckon."

"Justine hain't been lookin' very well lately," said Link Overshine, from the nail-keg.

"Hain't looked herself sence the kid come," added Hitchcock.

"When did she last hear from Jud?" asked Link.

"Talkin' to me?" asked Crawley.

"Yes."

"Well, how do you s'pose I know anything about her letters?"

"Don't you git the mail?"

"Harve Crose leaves it as he goes by, an' you know it, Overshine."

"She ain't had a letter from him in more'n a week," volunteered the postmaster. "He don't write very reg'lar here of late."

"Does the gover'ment hire you to tell who gits letters through this office an' when they git 'em?" demanded Crawley, sharply. Jim hitched back in his chair nervously.

"Why, they ain't no harm in that," explained he.

"You talk too much fer a job like this, Jim," said Crawley.

There followed a few moments of silence.

"One of Grimes' men says you morgidged your team to the old man," began Overshine.

"Which one of Grimes' men said that?" asked 'Gene, quietly.

"Why, I—er—lemme see, who *did* say it?" floundered Link, in distress.

"Oh, it don't matter," said 'Gene, carelessly. "I just asked."

The subject was dropped at once. The crowd watched him leave the place and conversation was stagnant until Hardesty, who was near the window, remarked that 'Gene was walking pretty rapidly down the road. With the knowledge that he was out of sight and hearing, the loungers discussed him and his affairs freely.

It was not until the fourth day that he received a letter from Chicago, directed in strange handwriting. A number of men were in the store when the epistle was handed out to him by Mrs. Hardesty. Without hesitation he tore open the envelope and began to read. The letter was for him, beyond a doubt, but Justine had not addressed the envelope. What had happened to her?

He read the letter with at least a dozen eyes

watching him closely, but his dark face betrayed no sign of emotion. At the end he calmly replaced the note in the envelope and strolled off homeward. Once out of the hearing of the curious, he leaned against a fence, read it again, folded it carefully, opened it and read it again, and then lowered his hands and gazed out over the fields.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TWO WOMEN AND A BABE.

"MR. SHERROD is not working for the paper now," responded a man in the counting room when Justine, overawed, applied for information at the office of the newspaper in which her husband's pictures had attracted such widespread notice. At the station a policeman had put her in a cab with directions to the driver. With her baby and her pitiful old satchel, she was jolted over the streets and up to the door of the newspaper office. She felt small, helpless, lost in this vast solitude of noises. The rush of vehicles, cars and people frightened her. Every moment she expected there would be a collision and catastrophe. And Jud was somewhere in this seething, heartless city, sick, unhappy, discouraged and longing for her.

"I know," she responded, thickly, to the clerk, whose glance had been cold and whose tones were curt. "He left here some months ago, but he gets his mail here."

"Does he?" brusquely.

"I address all of my letters to this office and he gets them."

"Country as can be," thought the clerk, his eye sweeping over her, "but devilish pretty. Lord, what eyes she's got." Then aloud, with a trifle more cordiality: "I'll ask Mr. Brokell if he knows where Sherrod lives. Just wait a minute, please." As he walked away there was one thought in his mind: "Sherrod is a lucky dog if he can get this woman to leave her happy home for him." In a few minutes he returned with the information that the address was not known in the office, but that he would be glad to assist her in the search. She thanked him and walked away. Somehow she did not like to meet the eye of this man. There was in it an expression she had never seen before, she who had looked only into the honest faces of country-men.

The shock of the clerk's blunt announcement that Jud's address was not known to any one then in the office was stupefying. So stunned with surprise was she that her wits did not return until she found herself caught up by the rushing throng on the sidewalk. When she paused in the aimless progress through the crowd she was far from the newspaper office and paralyzed by the realization that she and the baby had nowhere to go. In sheer

terror she stopped still and looked about with the manner of one who is aroused from a faint and finds a strange world looking on in sympathetic curiosity.

Busy men jostled her rudely, thoughtlessly; women arrayed as she had seen but one in her life, stared at her as she stood frightened and undecided in the middle of the sidewalk. There was no friendly face, no kindly hand in all that rushing crowd. Scarcely realizing what she did, she asked a man who leaned against the building nearby if he knew Dudley Sherrod. The man stared at her blankly for an instant, a sarcastic grin flashing across his hard face. The smile faded instantly, however, for, street loafer though he was, he saw the agony in her eyes, and knew that she had lost her way. With a politeness that surprised himself, he answered in the negative and then advised her to consult a directory.

She looked so helpless and unhappy that he volunteered to lead her to the nearest drug store. She followed him across the street, her baby on one arm, the big "telescope" bumping against her tired leg as she lugged it with the other hand. The city directory gave Dudley Sherrod's address as 1837 E—— street, but she remembered that he had left this place nearly a year before. Her friend, the

lounger, advised her to appeal to the police, but she revolted against anything suggestive of the "criminal." To ask the police to look for her husband was to her shocking.

A clerk in the store was appealed to by the lounger, and that individual agreed with him that the police alone could find "the Man," if he was to be found at all. All this was adding new terror. Tears came to Justine's eyes and she did not try to dash them away. Pride was conquered by despair. The clerk, taking matters in his own hands, called in a passing policeman, and bluntly told her to state the situation to him.

"In the fir'rst place, ma'am, d'ye know the felly here?" asked the officer, regarding the lounger with an unfriendly eye. The latter winced a bit but did his best to put up a brave show of resentment.

"She never seen me till ten minutes ago, Maher, an' I ain't done or said nawthin' wrong to her. Leave it to th' girl herself if I ain't been dead square. Ain't I, ma'am?"

"He's been very kind, policeman," answered Justine, eagerly.

"Sure, sure, Maher, dat's right," said the lounger, triumphantly.

"Did he's thry to touch ye, ma'am?" demanded the officer, still unsatisfied.

"No; sir; he did not do anything so rude. He was very kind, and I thank him," responded she, taking the word "touch" literally.

"What d'I tell you?" said the suspect in hurt tones.

"Kape yer gab out, Biggs," said the officer. "I mean, ma'am, did he ask yez fer money?"

"Oh, no, sir," said Justine confusedly.

"Never asked her fer a cent, on the dead——"

"That'll do ye, Biggs. Clear out, onnyhow," said the policeman, unpityingly.

"Aw, dat's not right——"

"G'wan now, will ye?" exclaimed Officer Maher, roughly shoving Mr. Biggs toward the door.

"Oh," cried Justine, indignantly. "Let him alone!" Her eyes were flashing angrily.

"It's all right, ma'am," explained the clerk, calmly.

"But he's done nothing wrong."

"You can't take chances with these bums. They're a bad lot. He's a tough customer, Biggs is. Don't have anything to do with strangers on the street. It's not safe." By this time the red-faced guardian of the peace was with them again, and Justine reluctantly explained her dilemma to him.

"He worked here for a long time as a newspaper artist," she said, in conclusion.

"I've seen his pictures many a time," said the clerk with new interest. "Is he your husband?"

"Yes, sir."

"I guess he's not on the paper now. I haven't seen his pictures for some time."

"He's been off the paper for nearly a year."

"Come wid me to hidquarters, ma'am, an' the chief'll sind some wan out to loca—ate him before night," said the officer. "Sthate yer case to the boss. It won't be no thrick to find him."

"I hate to have the police look for him," said she imploringly.

"Will, thin, phat'd yez call me in fer?" demanded the officer, harshly.

"I—I didn't call you in, sir," said she, looking helplessly at the clerk.

"I called you in, officer," said the clerk. "She didn't know what to do."

"Will, it's up to you, ma'am. We'll find him if yez say so."

"Do you know any one else in Chicago?" asked the clerk. "Maybe there's some one you could go to while they're trying to find your husband."

"I don't know any one here," she said, despairingly.

"Don't you want to leave your grip here? We'll take care of it till you come after it."

"That'll be all right, ma'am. It'll be safe here, an' yez don't want to be luggin' it around town wid that kid on yer hands. L'ave it here," said Officer Maher, and he picked it up and carried it behind the prescription counter before she could remonstrate. The clerk handed her a card containing the name and location of the store.

"Oh, I do know some one here," she cried suddenly, her face brightening. "Miss Celeste Wood. Do you think I could find her?"

To her dismay, the name was not in the directory.

"Does she live with her parents?" asked the clerk.

"I—I think so," replied Justine, helplessly.

"Do you know her father's name?"

"No, sir. She has a brother named Randall. Would his name be in the book?"

Young Wood's name and address were readily found by the clerk, and Officer Maher advised her to take a cab to the place at once. These men unceremoniously took matters in their own hands, and, almost before she knew it, a cab was taking her northward, bound for the home of the girl who

had so often sent her love, through Jud, to the other girl of Proctor's Falls.

The ride gave her ample time to reflect and she had not gone far before her thoughts were running once more in a straight channel. Her pride grew as the situation became plainer, displacing the first dread and confusion. How could she go to a stranger and inflict her with her troubles? What right had she to ask her assistance or even her interest in this hour of need? Besides all this, the mere confession that she could not find her husband would be humiliating to her and explanations would be sure to put Jud in an unpleasant light. It would mean that she must tell Miss Wood of his failure in everything, a condition which the young woman might politely deplore, but that was all. Her own poor garments now seemed the shabby reflection of Jud's poverty, his degradation, his fall from the high pedestal that had been his by promise. She could not look down into the bright, laughing eyes of her boy and go on to the shameful exposition of his father's misfortune. The red of pride mounted to her brown cheeks and the new fire in her eyes burned bright with the resolution to save him and herself from the humiliation of an appeal to Miss Wood.

Past rows of magnificent homes she was driven,

but they interested her not at all. Beneath her pride, however, there battled the fast-diminishing power of reason. Try as she would, she could not drive out the stubborn spark which told her that she must call upon some one in her helplessness—but that the "some one" should be a woman was distressing. As she was struggling with pride and reason, the cab turned in and drew up at the curb in front of a handsome house. Her heart gave a great bound of dismay.

"This is No. ——, ma'am," said the driver, as he threw open the door.

"I—I don't believe I'll go in," she stammered, trembling in every nerve.

"Where shall I take you?" he asked wearily. Little he cared for the emotions of his fares.

"Are you sure this is the place?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am. Do you want to get out?"

Fresh courage inspired her, brought about by the sharp realization that it was the only way to find help, humiliating though the method might be. There was no other way, and his question: "Where shall I take you?" reminded her forcibly that she had no place to go.

"Yes," she said, decisively, and with the haste of one who is afraid that hesitation will bring weakness, she stepped to the carriage-block.

"Shall I wait, ma'am?"

"I don't know how long I'll be here," she said, her ignorance confronted by another puzzle. The driver saw in his mind sufficient cause for her uncertainty, and sagely concluded that she was a poor mother who expected to find a home for her babe with the wealthy people who lived at No. ——.

"I'll drive into the park and be back in half an hour, ma'am, if you think you'll be there that long," he said, and away he rolled. She mounted the steps quickly and, after a long and embarrassing search, found the electric button and rang the door bell. A trim maid responded. Justine had fondly hoped that Miss Wood herself would come to the door, and her heart sank with disappointment.

"Is Miss Wood at home?" she managed to ask.

"She does not live here," replied the maid, surveying the caller with a superior and supercilious air.

"I thought her brother——" began Justine, faintly. She felt as if she were about to fall.

"Mr. and Mrs. Wood live here, and they have a married daughter living over in S—— Place. I have only been here since Monday, ma'am, and I can't tell you her address."

"It is Miss Celeste Wood I want to see," said poor Justine, her lip trembling.

"That's the name—Celeste. She was here yesterday, and I heard Mrs. Wood speak the name. Won't Mrs. Wood do as well?" There was kindness in the voice now; Justine's eyes had made their usual conquest.

"I'd—I'd rather see Miss Celeste," she said, timidly. "Can't you tell me where she lives?"

"I'll ask Mrs. Wood. The butler'd know, but he is sick. Will you wait inside the door? What a pretty baby."

She was gone but a few minutes, returning before Justine's dazed eyes had half accustomed themselves to the attractive place.

"She lives at No. 1733 S—— Place. You go to the next corner and turn west. The house is in the second block."

The day was cold and her bare hands were numb. The wind from the lake cut through her thin garments so relentlessly that she longed for the protection of the carriage, which was not to return for half an hour—and then to the wrong place. What if Celeste were not at home? She could not ask to be permitted to sit in her house until her return; that would be too much of an imposition. She could only return to the street and wait for half an hour in the freezing winds for the cab, which seemed like a home to her now.

A hurrying figure in furs and brown approached from the direction in which she was going. The two drew nearer and nearer, the one walking rapidly against the wind, the other driven along more swiftly than was her wont by the heavy gale at her back. Justine was the first to recognize the other. Her heart gave a great bound of joy, for there could be no mistaking the face of the woman who faced the wind. The country girl jubilantly uttered in her soul a prayer of gratitude to the Providence that had brought her face to face with the one she sought. She half stopped as the other drew near. Celeste's eyes met hers. Evidently she was surprised to observe a desire to speak with her on the part of a stranger. Justine's eyes were wide with relief and her lips were parted as if words were just inside. Celeste's eyes narrowed for one brief instant of indecision, and then she knew. There was but one face like Justine Van's, and it had been in her mind for days and days. She had just come from it, in fact, and her heart was still aching with the pain of seeing it on Jud's easel not an hour before. But what could the girl be doing in Chicago? was the thought that flashed into her mind. Even as she opened her lips to greet her, her hands extended, it was known to her that Justine could be going only to the home of Jud Sherrod. Justine's

joy was too great for words and Celeste's heart went out to her irresistibly. Despite the wanness of the face and the dark circles under the eyes, Justine's were still the vivid, matchless features that Celeste had envied in that other day. Though she was sorely troubled by the inexplicable presence of the one woman whom she had been thinking of for days, Celeste could but greet her warmly.

"This is the greatest surprise in the world," cried Celeste. "Who would have dreamed of seeing you here?"

"I have just come from your old home. They told me you lived on this street," said Justine, her voice hoarse with emotion.

"And you were going to my home," cried Celeste, just as if intuition had not told her so before. "I was on my way to mother's. Isn't it lucky we met? I will go back with you at once. You must be very cold. And—a baby? Oh, the dear little one! How cold it must be."

"I have him well wrapped up," said Justine. Celeste mentally noted that the child was protected at the sacrifice of the mother's comfort, for Justine looked half frozen.

"Is he—is he your boy?" asked Celeste, and a wave of happiness surged over her when the answer

came. Did it not prove that she was married and forever out of Jud's life?

"I am sure he must be a handsome little fellow," said she, as they turned from the sidewalk to the steps leading to the door of her home.

"He looks like his father—and not a bit like me," said Justine, modestly.

"Have you named him?"

"He is named after his father, of course."

"A token of real love."

"Of love, yes—he could have had no other name. I am so happy that he is a boy." The door swung open and they were in the warm hallway.

"You must let me see him. Bring him to the grate. But, first, take off your hat and coat. Mary will relieve you of them. Now, let me see him."

Dudley, the second, was awake, wide-eyed and frightened, when he looked up into the two faces above him.

"Does he not look like his father?" asked Justine, happily.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE END OF IT ALL.

CELESTE started. Justine's innocent query rudely tore down the curtain that had hung between her understanding and Jud's strange behavior, and it seemed to her, in that one brief, horrible moment, that she saw all that was black and ugly in life.

She could take her eyes from the mother's gentle face only to let them rest upon the features of the baby. Justine's question—"Does he not look like his father?"—could have but one answer. Dudley Sherrod's likeness was stamped on the face of the boy, unmistakable, accusing. In her terror, the face of the little one seemed to age suddenly until there loomed up before her the features of Jud, the man.

Powerless to answer, she turned abruptly and staggered to a window, leaning heavily against the casing, her heart like lead, her face as white as death. She knew now the cause of everything that had mystified and troubled her in Jud's conduct. Now she knew why the picture of Justine was before him, now she knew why the mention of her

name threw him into confusion. The whole wretched truth was plain.

"Oh, Jud! Oh, Jud!" she cried to herself. "Oh, this poor ruined girl! How could he have done such a—oh, God, no, no! I must be wrong. The resemblance is not real—it is my fancy. But—but, why does she ask me if he looks like his father? What other father can there be—what other man is known to both of us? But how young the boy is; Jud has not seen her in years. He cannot be the father. Why am I afraid? Why have I doubted him?" The voice of the other woman came to her from the fireplace, indistinct, jumbled and as if through the swirl of a storm.

"Pardon me, but I do not know what your name is now," was the apologetic remark from the other side of the room, and Celeste turned to her.

"My name is—is Sherrod, Miss Van," she said, slowly. Justine looked up in surprise and bewilderment. A shadow of unbelief crossed her face.

"Sherrod?" she asked, curiously. "Why, how strange that we should have the same name."

"The same name, Miss Van?"

"My name has not been Van for a long, long time. We were married before you met us in Proctor's Falls, I'm—why, what is the matter?"

"It is not true—it is not true," half shrieked

"IT IS NOT TRUE," HALF SHRIEKED CELESTE.

Celeste. Justine shrank back as if confronted by a mad woman, instinctively shielding her boy. "Do you mean to tell me you were married to Jud Sherrod?" she continued, scornfully.

"Of course I was—don't look at me like that! What in the name of heaven is the matter, Mrs.—Mrs.——" A sickening thought struggled into Justine's mind. "Your name is—is Sherrod, too," she said, dully. "Has—has Jud anything to do with it?"

"He is not your husband," cried Celeste, pityingly.

"What do you mean?" gasped Justine, limp and white. "Jud and I married three years ago——"

"Oh!" moaned Celeste. Justine's extended arm caught her as she dropped forward. The wild blue eyes looked piteously into the frightened brown ones, and the gray lips repeated hoarsely: "Are you sure? Are you sure?"

"What shall I do?" moaned Justine. "I am his wife, I know I am. Nobody can deny it. Why, why, I have the certificate——" she went on eagerly. Celeste struggled to her feet.

"Then what in the name of heaven has he made of me?" she cried, hoarsely.

"I don't understand," murmured Justine dully. "Do you—do you love him?"

"Love him? Love him? Why, woman, he is my husband!"

The world went black before Justine's eyes. She fell back in the deep chair; her big eyes closed, her hands relaxed their clasp on the boy and he slid to the protecting arm of the chair; her breath clogged her throat. As consciousness fled, she saw Celeste sink to the floor at her feet.

A man drew aside the curtains a few minutes afterwards and planted a heavy foot inside the room. His sombre eyes were on the floor and it was not until he was well inside the room that his gaze fell upon the still group at the fireplace. He paused, his tired eyes for the moment resting wearily on the scene. Slowly his mind, which had been far away, caught up the picture before him. His dull sensibilities became active.

Celeste was lying on the floor. She had fainted. He stretched forth his arms to lift her and his eyes fell upon the upturned face of the woman in the chair. Petrified, he stood for an age, it seemed. Comprehension slowly forced its way into his brain.

"Justine!" A shriek of terror burst in his throat; the sound did not reach his lips. The end had come! It was all over! They knew—they *knew!* They knew him for what he was. He had not the strength to flee; he only knew that he was

face to face with the end. He must stand his ground, as well now as any time. He waited. There would be cries, sobs, wails and bitterness.

But no sounds came from the lips of the two women. The baby alone stared in wonder at this strange man. The faces of the unconscious girls were deathlike, Justine's drawn with pain, Celeste's white and weak. Unconsciously his hand touched Justine's face, then her breast. She did not move, but her heart was beating. With the same mechanical calmness he dropped to one knee and half raised Celeste's head, expecting her eyes to open. The lids lay still and dark and her neck was limp. As he rose to his feet stiffly, his eyes fell upon the face of the boy and it was as if he were a child again and looking at himself in the old mirror up at the house "on the pike."

He could not meet the smile of that innocent spectator. In a fever of haste lest either woman should revive before he could be hidden from their wretched eyes, he pressed cold lips to their lips, covered the baby's face with kisses and a flood of tears that suddenly burst forth, and then dashed blindly from the room and up the broad staircase, terrified by the sound of his own footfalls, in dread of a piteous call from below, eager to escape the eyes, the condemning eyes that once had loved him.

Celeste was the first to open her eyes. For many minutes she lay where she had fallen, striving to remember how she came to be there. Memory gradually pushed aside the kindly numbness—and she saw clearly. Dragging herself to the mantel post, she tried to regain her feet. The effort was vain; her strength had not returned. Leaning against the mosaic background, she turned her eyes upon the motionless figure in the chair. She never knew what her thoughts were as she sat there and gazed upon the face of the other woman, Justine Van—Justine Van, the girl of Proctor's Falls.

At last a long sigh came from Justine's lips, there was a deep shudder and then the fluttering lips parted, two wide, dazed eyes of brown staring into space. Minutes passed before the gaze of the two women met. There were no words, nothing but the fixed stare of horror. Moved by a desperate impulse, Celeste struggled to her feet, her glazed eyes bent upon the face of the baby. Steadying herself for an instant against the mantel, she lurched forward, hatred in her heart, her hands outstretched. The fingers locked themselves in the folds of the child's dress and he was raised above the head of the frenzied woman.

Justine's weak hand went up appealingly; she had not strength to rise and snatch the child from the other's clutches.

"Then kill me, too," she whispered, closing her eyes.

A crowing laugh came from the child. The laugh of an infant who is tossed on high and revels in the fun. A moment later he was lying in his mother's lap and his enemy was sobbing as she laid her hand in the dark hair of the other woman.

A distant scream came from somewhere in the house, but the two women did not hear it. A maid came scurrying downstairs, white and excited. She dashed unceremoniously into the room, panting out the single exclamation:

"Hurry!"

Celeste slowly turned toward her.

"What is it, Mary?" she asked, mechanically, almost unconsciously.

"Mr. Sherrod, ma'am—you must come quick. In the studio," gasped the maid.

"Is Jud here?" asked Justine, raising herself in the chair. A new light struggled into her eyes. Celeste, cold with the certainty of some terrible news, straightened to receive the blow.

"Is it—bad, Mary?" she asked.

"Oh, ma'am, I—I can't tell you," almost whispered the girl. "It's awful! I'll see him to my dying day."

"He—he is dead?" The question came from frozen lips.

The maid burst into tears.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HEARTS.

SHERROD'S body lay stretched across the rug in front of the grate in his studio. His coat and vest had been hastily thrown aside and his white shirt, covering the deep chest, was saturated with blood. The carved hilt of a Malay dagger stood defiantly above the cleft heart. The steel was deep in his body.

He had dealt one blow, but he had sent the blade of the kris straight home; so true was its course that death must have been instantaneous. He lay flat on his broad back, his neck twisted as if checked in the supreme moment of agony; death had left its stamp of pain on his ghastly face.

On the floor near the body a piece of white paper was found, across which was scrawled:

"Forgive me."

The hand that penciled these words was the same that drove home the blade, but it had trembled only in the writing, not in the blow. The hasty scrawl revealed his eagerness to have over with life while there was yet a chance to escape facing the ruined women below. The last plea of the suicide was

not directed to either of the loved ones; it was left for each to take it to her heart and in secrecy hold it as hers alone—cherishing it, if she could.

His had been a crime that the law could not sufficiently punish. He had inflicted the penalty himself and he had asked forgiveness of those he had wronged in his weakness. They had loved him to the hour of his death; they had trusted him. Neither had known him in his baseness or his cowardice—they knew him only as loving, devoted and true. Death came just as the joys of being his were shattered; the pains he had given them in life were known only after he had gone from them. They were asked to forgive a dead man who had been everything to them in life, and whom they had loved until his last breath was drawn; he did not wait to receive their reproaches; he had gone away as they had known him and they had not looked upon the face of guilt.

*   *   *   *

Celeste was the calmer of the two and yet she was the more deeply wronged. After the first grief she arose, bleeding and broken from the wreck of every joy, and she was strong. Justine, stunned by grief and horror, lay for hours in the bed to which she had been carried by the maids after the terrible scene in the studio. With the slow return of com-

posure, Celeste saw dimly the situation as it existed for her. She was not a widow. The widow was the other woman who had crouched on the opposite side of the corpse, pleading with him to come back to her and the boy. While she could not as yet grasp the full reality of her position, she felt that Justine's claim was best.

It was she who had Justine taken to a room by the maids. There was no rage in her heart; she took that other one into her grief and shared it with her. There was no other way; they had suffered together. There still lingered a faint hope—cruel though it was—that she might be the real wife, and Justine the false one. Hours after the calamity, far in the night, while her mother bathed her head and sought to soothe her, Celeste planned and planned.

She knew that if Justine's claim were true, Jud had deliberately made a wanton of her, even though he loved her. The world would soon know that she was not a wife, and the newspapers would be nauseous with the sensation. She was confident, however, that she was the only one in the house who knew Justine's story, and as she lay waiting for the dawn there grew in her mind a steady purpose. The world must never know!

Justine, pale and dead-eyed, stood looking from

the window of the bed-chamber when the knock came at her door the next morning. She did not respond, she did not even turn her head, for her thoughts were of the night before, and the life before that. Celeste softly opened the door and came to her side.

"Justine," she said gently, almost inaudibly. Dark, heavy, despairing eyes were turned upon her and she feared for the success of her plan.

"Am I to go to him now?" came the lifeless voice of the other.

"Justine," said Celeste, taking a cold hand in her own, "we must understand each other, we must know the truth. I don't think anything that can happen now will hurt us; we are dead to all pain. We must talk about—about ourselves."

"I don't understand what it all means," moaned Justine. "Why can't I go to Jud? He is mine—he is mine, and—and——"

"But, Justine, dear, it is of this that we must talk. I—I thought he was mine. Oh God, don't you see? I have lived as his wife for months and—and I never knew until you came that I—that I—oh, don't you understand?"

Justine's unwillingness to believe evil of Jud, despite all that had happened to prove the existence of a double life, was a barrier hard to break down, and

it was not without long entreaties and explanations that Celeste made her see that her claim had some justification. At last these two women brought themselves down to the point from which the situation could be seen plainly in all its unhappy colorings. Together in the darkness that he had cast about them they groped their way toward the light of understanding; as they went, the heart of each was bared to the other, and both saw and sought to ease the pain the rents disclosed.

There was no denying Justine's right to call Jud husband. Celeste saw her every hope slipping away as she listened to the story of the courtship and marriage in the little country lane. She knew now that she had never been a wife, and she knew that she had to live all the rest of her life beneath an ugly shadow. Whatever were her thoughts of the man who had so basely wronged her, she kept them to herself. Not one word of reproach did she utter in the presence of the wife and mother. The consequences of his crime were hers to bear, and her only object in life now was to prevent others from sharing them with her, to prevent the world from knowing of their existence. If she loathed the memory of the man who had despoiled her honor, she held that loathing secret. To the world, he was

her husband, and the world should see her mourn for him.

Her proposition to Justine was at first indignantly rejected, but so skillfully did she paint the picture of her position in life as Jud had left it for her, that the tender, honest girl from the country fell completely under the influence of her pleading. Justine was made to see Jud's fault in all its blackness, and was urged to share in the effort to protect his memory. No one was to know of the double life he had led; no one was to know of his crime; no one was to curse his memory; two women alone were to—forget, if they could.

Between them it was agreed that in Chicago Justine was to appear as a cousin of the dead man, and the funeral obsequies were to be conducted with the real wife in the background, the other as the deepest mourner. The body was to be taken afterwards to Clay township for burial, and there Justine was to claim her dead, with Celeste posing as the good friend in the hour of direst trouble. That was the general plan, the minor but intricate details being intrusted to Celeste.

"Here he was my husband, and the world may never be the wiser," said she, taking the other to her grateful heart. "Down there he is yours, and no one there must know how he has served you.

You can save me, Justine, and I can shield him from the curses of your people. He will lie in the grave you dig for him away down there, and your friends may always look upon his headstone and say: 'He was a good man. We all loved him.' It is fair, Justine, and I will love you to my dying day for doing all this for me."

"I love you," said Justine, and they went forth to play their unhappy parts.

It was Celeste, keen and bold in her desperation, who wrote the letter to 'Gene Crawley, signing a fictitious name, Justine looking over her shoulder with streaming eyes. It briefly told of a sudden death and ended with the statement that a telegram would follow announcing the time of leaving Chicago with the body. The newspapers in the city told the story of the suicide, giving the cause as ill-health, and pictured the grief of the young widow. Celeste saw the reporters herself. Purposely, deliberately she misinformed them in many of the details regarding his birthplace and his earlier life. This act of shrewdness on her part was calculated to mislead the people of Clay township, and it succeeded. No one could connect the identity of the suicide with that of the youth who had gone out from that Indiana community long ago.

How the two women lived through the funeral

service in S—— Place was past all understanding. The real wife heard the sobs of the other and choked with the grief she was compelled to suppress. The other wept, but who knows whether the tears were tribute of love for the man over whom the clergyman said such gentle, hopeful words? A dead man and two women knew the story that would have shocked the world. One could not speak, the others would not. And so he was eulogized.

That night the two women and their dead left Chicago for Glenville. Their only companion was Dudley Sherrod, the second.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CRAWLEY'S LEGACY.

THE people of Clay Township were kept in the dark concerning the manner in which Jud came to his death. The letter to 'Gene merely announced that his sudden death was due to a hemorrhage, and another letter to Parson Marks from Justine's friend in the city bore the same news. Naturally Jud's friends believed that the hemorrhage was of the lungs, which inspired ninety per cent. of them to say that they had always regarded him as frail. Some went so far as to recall predictions made when he was a boy to the effect that he "wouldn't live to see thirty year."

Crawley and Harve Crose drove to Glenville in Harve's wagon to meet the train, prepared to haul the casket to the cemetery, where Mr. Marks was to conduct short services. There was no hearse in Glenville, but there was a carpenter who buried people as a "side line." Rich people in the neighborhood sent to an adjoining county seat for embalmers and undertakers; Clay township buried its dead at it was able and saw fit. Justine would not permit Celeste to pay the expenses of the funeral at

Jud's old home and she herself could not afford the luxury of a hearse and mourners' carriage. The arrangements were in the hands of Mr. Marks, Crawley and Crose, and the details were of the simplest character.

The aristocratic "two-seated rig" of David Strong and Martin Grimes's surrey were at the station to act as conveyances for Justine and the minister and a select few. Dozens of buggies, buckboards and not a few spring wagons fell in behind the "mourners' carriages" when the cortege left the depot platform, headed for the cemetery four miles away. Justine, her face hidden in a dense veil of black, occupied the back seat in David Strong's vehicle, and the whole country-side longed to comfort her. By her side sat a pale, beautiful woman in a simple gown of black—the city friend the community had heard so much about. The baby found a comfortable resting place in the capacious lap of Mrs. Strong, who sniffled continuously while her husband drove solemnly and imposingly through the streets of the village. The town looked on with sombre gaze and the country spoke in a respectful whisper. Sad was the home-coming of the Sherrods.

The long procession, headed by the wagon containing the casket, wound its slow way out into the

country, through the winter-clean lane, past the house in which Jud and Justine were married, and up to the gate of the dilapidated, weather-worn "burying-ground" on the hill. In oppressive silence, the throng crowded over and about the weed-covered graves in the ill-kept little cemetery to witness every movement in connection with the ceremony. They saw the casket lifted from the wagon bed by six young men and they opened a pathway from the gate to the grave through which the pall-bearers passed with heavy tread; they saw the long black box in which Dudley Sherrod had come home lowered into the clay-colored gulf; they saw Justine, moaning as she stood between old Mrs. Crane and the stranger from the city; but they could not see the heart of that white-faced stranger, who looked with tear-dimmed eyes into the grave at her feet.

Justine's grief was pitiful. Not a man, woman or child in that assemblage but shed tears of genuine sympathy. The men and women who had gathered at the pastor's home not many months before to condemn her, now stood among the graves and wept with her. Not a few cast curious eyes upon the fair stranger and went away to say afterwards that she was the kind of friend to have.

The choir of the little church sang several hymns from books that Jud and Justine had used in days

gone by. Heads were bared in the biting air, and no man was there who did not do full honor to Jud Sherrod, the goodliest boy the township had ever produced. The grief of the people was honest. Mr. Marks, inspired by the opportunity, delivered such a discourse on the goodness, the nobility of the young man, that the community, with one voice, proclaimed it to be a masterpiece of oratory.

"And to this devoted young wife, for whom he struggled so manfully, so loyally up to the very hour of his taking away, God gives His boundless pity and will extend His divinest help. Dudley Sherrod, our departed brother, was the soul of honor. He loved his home and the mistress of it second only to his Maker. I voice what is known to the world at large when I say that never lived there a man whose heart was more thoroughly given over to the keeping of woman. And she loved and revered him, and we see her inconsolable, bereft of all earthly joy. We pray God that she may see the brightness beyond this cloud that He has in His wisdom thrown about her. And we pray for the life, the soul of this baby boy who lies fatherless in this—er—this cold world. He will never know the love of a father. We all glory in the privilege of having known this true, honest Christian man, a man whose life bore not a single blemish. His life

was an example to all mankind. Oh, ye who listen to my words in this sad hour, strive to emulate his example. Do ye as he has done, live the life he has lived. How many of us are there who might have lived as he—er—did—if we but had the courage to follow the impulses of the soul. He has gone to his reward."

* * * * *

Just before the shades of night fell across the grief-ridden community, Justine escaped the kind ministrations of Mrs. Crane, Mrs. Hardesty, Mrs. Bolton and other good dames who had followed her to the cottage after the chill services in the cemetery for the purpose of comforting her. They had gone to the cottage with red eyes, choking whispers and hands eager to lift her up, and she was trying to avoid these good offices. She crept into the bleak little room upstairs to which Celeste had long since fled to find solitude for her broken heart.

Celeste was stretched upon the bed, face downward, and her slim body was as still as Jud's had been. The feeling of dread in Justine's heart was not dispelled until her hands touched the warm cheek, and her ear caught the sound of a faint, tear-choked sigh.

"It is I, Celeste," she said, gently. "Won't you let me hold you in my arms? See! I am strong

again and I must take some one to my heart. It seems so empty, so dead, so cold. You don't hate me for this day, do you?"

Celeste turned her face to the girl above and stretched forth her hand.

"I love you, Justine," she sobbed, and their wet faces were pressed close together on the same pillow. After many minutes she asked abruptly: "What are you going to do, Justine?"

"Do?" asked the other, blankly. "I don't know. I haven't thought."

"You will not stay here, you cannot stay here where—where——"

"But where can I go? What do you mean?"

"I want to be with you always—I want to be near his—your boy," said the other. "Oh, Justine, I must have some one to love, I must have some one to love me. Don't you see, can't you see? I want you to love me and I want his boy to love me. You—you cannot stay here—you shall not stay here and suffer alone; you must not bear it all alone. We took the blow together, dearest Justine; let us bear it together, let us live through it together."

And so it was that the women Jud Sherrod had made happy and unhappy in his brief, misguided life, found a vacant place each in the heart of the other and filled that place with the love that could

not be dishonored. It was a long time before Justine could fully comprehend the extent of the other's proposition and it was much longer before she was won over by almost abject pleading on the part of the wretched, lonely girl who had been wife in name only.

Celeste convinced Justine that she was entitled to all that Jud had left as a legacy; she deliberately classified herself as a part of his estate, an article among his goods and chattels, and as such she belonged to his widow and heir. The home in S—— Place was, by right of law, Justine's, argued the pleader, and all that Jud had died possessed of was in that house. So persistent was she in the desire to obtain her end that she triumphed over Justine's objections. It was settled that they were to live together, travel together so long as both found the union agreeable.

Celeste's plan included a long stay in Europe, a complete flight from all that had been laid bare and waste in the world they had known with him. In two weeks they were to sail and there was no time set for their return. Justine's most difficult task was to be performed in the interim. It was to be the rewarding of Eugene Crawley.

She had seen him at the grave-side, standing directly opposite her across the narrow opening in the

ground. The pallor of his face was so marked that even she had observed it. He had not raised his eyes to look at her, but she had seen his chest rise and fall.

The third day after the funeral she faced Crawley in the barn-lot. With Celeste she was to leave that evening for Chicago and the time had come for settlement. She stood near the little gate that led to the barn-lot and he approached slowly, uncertain as to the propriety of addressing this woman in grief. It was to be his first word to her since he said good-by on the day that took her to Chicago with his money in her purse, the price of his horses. He had staked his all to give her the means to find Sherrod and she had found him.

"'Gene, I am going away," she said, extending her hand as he came up.

"Going away?" he repeated, blankly.

"Yes. Miss Wood has asked me to accompany her to Europe and—and I am going."

He was silent for a long time, his dazed eyes looking past her as if sightless.

"That's—that's a long ways to go, Justine," he said at last, and his voice was husky. The broad hand which had held hers for an instant, shook as he laid it on the gate post.

"It is very good of her, 'Gene, and I love her so

much," she said. She saw again that love was not dead in his heart and the revelation frightened her. "You have been so good to me, 'Gene, and I don't know how I am ever to repay you," she hurried on, eager to pass the crisis.

"You—you c'n pay me in your own way an' in your own time," he said, looking intently at the ground, uncertain of his own meaning.

"We leave to-night," she said, "and I must not go away without—without settling with you."

"Settlin' with me," he echoed. There was no passing over the bitterness in his voice. "You are goin' to-night. Good God!——" he burst out, but the new habit of self-repression was strong. "I beg your pardon, Justine," he went on a moment later. "To-night?"

"Mr. Strong will take us to the train at six o'clock," she said. She had not looked for so much emotion. " 'Gene, I owe you so much that I don't see how I am ever to pay you. Not only is it money that I owe, but gratitude. I have thought it all out, 'Gene, and there is only one way in which I can pay the smallest part of my debt, for the debt of gratitude can never be paid. I have sent for 'Squire Rawlings and—and, 'Gene, I know you won't misunderstand me—I am going to ask you

to accept this farm from me, to be yours and yours only. The 'Squire will bring the deed, and——"

"Justine!" he exclaimed, looking her full in the eyes. "You wouldn't do that—you don't mean that!" The darkest pain she had ever seen was in his eyes.

"You deserve it and more——" she began, shrinking before his gaze. He held up his hand piteously and turned his face away, and she could see his struggle for control. At last he turned to her, his face white and drawn, his eyes steady, his voice less husky than before.

"You must never say such a thing to me ag'in, Justine. I know you meant all right an' you thought I'd be satisfied with the bargain, but you—you mustn't offer to pay me ag'in. You've paid me all that's comin' to me, you've paid me by makin' a good man of me, that's what you've done. I'd die before I'd take this—this land o' your'n an' that little boy's. You're mighty good an'—an'——Oh, cain't you see it's no use in me tryin' to talk about it? Wait! You was about to begin beggin' me to take it. I want to ast you as the greatest favor you ever done for me, don't say it. Don't say it. I cain't stand it, Justine!"

"Forgive me, 'Gene, forgive me," she said, tears streaming down her cheeks. "You deserve more

than I can ever give you, dear friend. I did not mean to hurt you——"

"It's all over, so let's say no more about it," he said, breathing deeply and throwing up his head. "I'll take keer o' your farm while you're gone, Justine, an' it'll be here in good order when you're ready to come back to it. It'll be kept in good shape for the boy. Don't you ever worry about the place. It's your'n an' I'll take good keer of it for you. You're goin' to ketch the evenin' train?"

"Yes," she said gently, "and I may be gone for a long time, 'Gene."

"Well," he said with difficulty, "I guess we'd better say good—good-bye. You've lots to do in the house an' I want to do some work in the wagon-shed. Good-bye, Justine; be—be good to yourself." It was the greatest battle that rough 'Gene Crawley had ever waged, but he came out of it without a scar to be ashamed of.

"I want to ask you to—to look after Jud's grave, 'Gene," she said, her hand in his. "There is no one else I can ask, and I want it kept better—better than the rest up there. Will you see to it for me?"

"I'll—I'll 'tend to it for you, Justine," he said, but his face went pale.

For a full minute she looked, speechless, upon the white, averted face of the man whose love was

going to its death so bravely, and a great warmth crept into her cold veins—a warmth born in a strange new tenderness that went out to him. A sudden, sharp contraction of the heart told her as plainly as though the message had come in words that the love in this man's heart would never die, never falter. Somehow, the drear, chill prospect grew softer, warmer in the discovery that love could still live in this dead, ugly world, that after all fires were burning kindly for her. There was a thrill in her voice as she murmured, brokenly:

"Good-bye, 'Gene, and God bless and keep you."

"Good-bye," he responded, releasing her hand. He did not raise his eyes until the door of the cottage closed after her.

At dusk David Strong drove away from the little house in the lane, and the Sherrods went with him. 'Gene Crawley stood in the shadow of the barn, his hopeless eyes fastened on the vehicle until it was lost among the trees.

A sharp, choking sound came from his throat as he turned those dark, hungry eyes from the purple haze that screened the carriage from view. About him stretched the poor little farm, as dead as his hopes; at his back stood the almost empty barn; yonder was the deserted house from which no gleam of light shone.

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He was alone. There was nothing left but the lifeless, unkind shadows. Slowly he strode to the little gate through which she had passed. His hands closed over the pickets tenderly and then his lips were pressed to the latch her fingers had touched in closing the gate perhaps for the last time—closing it with him a prisoner until she chose to come back and release him.

A moment later his face dropped to his arms as they rested on the post, and he sobbed as though his heart would break.